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# Tracing embodied black feminist geographies - Dance as a pathway to black feminist spaces in Brazil

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Abstract

This study explores the interconnections between dance and geography. The main research questions are:

1. How can dance locate black feminist geographies?
2. What is the role of embodied expression in black feminist geographies?

An essential part of this study is to consider dance as an opening of geographical knowledge and new ways of being. The embodied nature of dance and black feminisms will be analyzed.

This study is both theoretical and empirical, but the methodological emphasis is on the theoretical discussion. Empirical material was gathered in Brazil using qualitative methods, 6 interviews were conducted with female dancers from Olinda, Brazil. The empirical material of two dances is discussed along with the theoretical frame and more closely in the final chapter.

The results of this study were that dance works as an embodied practice of expression which brings black feminist geographies into being through movement. Dance forms a liminal space, which connects the body with material and physical space in time and space through embodiment. Dance can work as a spatial practice to elude power structures and form agency.

The study is structured as follows. First, I will introduce the research questions and fieldwork, followed by the theoretical framework, and finally I will conclude with analysis on how dance can trace black feminist geographies.



Keywords

Black feminist geography, non-representational geography, development geography, dance

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Tiivistelmä

Tämä tutkielma käsittelee tanssin ja mustan feministisen maantieteen suhdetta. Päätutkimuskysymys on, miten tanssi voi paikantaa ja tunnistaa mustaa feminismiä liikkeen ja kehon kautta. Mustan feministisen maantieteen tarkoituksena on purkaa vallitsevia rodullistettuja ja sukupuolittuneita valtarakenteita.

Tutkielma on toteutettu laadullisilla menetelmillä, ja on sekä teoreettinen että empiirinen. Tutkielman painopiste on kuitenkin teoriassa. Empiirinen haastatteluaineisto toimii tutkimusprosessin alustuksena sekä kuljettaa tutkielman teoreettista viitekehystä. Empiirinen aineisto on kerätty Brasiliassa koostuen kuudesta haastattelusta naistanssijoiden kanssa.

Tutkimus päätyy siihen, että tanssi voi paikantaa mustan feministisen tilan materiaalisen kehollisen tilan luomisen kautta. Kehon liminaalinen tila ruumillistuu tanssissa sekä sijoittaa rodullistetun naisen kehon sen historialliseen ja spatiaaliseen tarinaan, luoden sen uudestaan liikkeen kautta. Täten tanssissa yhdistyy sekä maantiede, kehollisuus ja paluu olemisen tilaan, joka mahdollistaa tilan uudelleen ymmärtämisen.

Tutkielma rakentuu siten, että ensin esittelen keskeisimmät käsitteet ja tutkimuskysymykset jatkaen teoreettiseen viitekehykseen, ja lopuksi esitän päätelmät, miten tanssi voi johdattaa mustan feminismin tarinoihin ja kertoa niitä uudelleen.



Avainsanat

Musta feministinen maantiede, non-representational maantiede, kulttuurimaantiede, tanssi

Säilytyspaikka

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**Contents**

# 1. Introduction

This study explores interconnections between dance and black feminist geographies. Dance offers many possibilities to examine the nature of the world and how realities are formed in a non-cognitive and non-linear way. In this study the focus is on the space entered in dance through embodiment which in movement creates a connection to the lived body and world. The realities discussed in this thesis are black feminisms which can be engaged with through dance as an embodied praxis. Theoretical framework formulates dance as an expressive, embodied space of black feminist geography and is illustrated through qualitative interview material with women from Brazil. Theoretical sources connect literature comprised in black feminist geographies such as Katherine McKittrick (2006), Patricia Collins (2000) and non-representational geographies (NRT) by Nigel Thrift (1997, 2000, 2008) and Derek McCormack (2013) for example. The emphasis is on embodied practices, which constitute agency via experience within black colonial diaspora. Two afro-Brazilian dances from North-Eastern Brazil, Brazilian funk and samba de coco, serve as empirical material where I conducted interviews with women and participated at the dances. These two dances are both social dances in the area popular within afro-Brazilian women.

Arts and alternative expressions by marginalized groups are typically analyzed through the dominate group's perspective as representations of subaltern identities as the 'other' - instead of being considered valid, lived experiences as themselves. Performative practices like dance have often been analyzed only from a representational point of view as displaying symbolic and discursive meanings through the body. In this study however, the emphasis is on dance as an intertwined, non-representational practice which generates and locates geographies.

## 1.1. My departure point

As I embarked on the journey for this thesis, honestly, I had no idea what to expect and where this path might lead me. All I knew I was interested in afro-Brazilian women's experiences and had a strong desire to understand the nature of 'movement and being' in life and what effect

it has in different realities and if I could conduct a research in an experimental, processual way by using improvisation and intuition as my guides. But, most importantly, I wanted to know what connects these realities and the place of dance in the process. So, I left for Brazil wanting to hear and learn about afro-Brazilian women's experiences and stories. The perspective was still vague at this point, and the field trip was the beginning of the process of finding inspiration and a pathway to construct this thesis.

My process began in Brazil where I was drafting the frame of my research. Initial research questions found below were part of this process.

**Initial research questions**

How do afro-Brazilian women feel in a racialized society of Brazil?

How can dance be understood as theory?

Can women feel empowered and find agency through dance?

What is the relationship between dance and geography?

As my preliminary research questions were so broad, I began to think what specifically interested me in the frame of feminist geography through dance and the lived body. Along the process, I found different literature that inspired and evolved my thinking, which produced the main research questions outlined below, and the third as my potential question of interest for the future.

**Evolved research questions**

**1**. How can dance re-imagine and locate black feminist geographies?

> The main research question is: how can dance trace black feminist geographies into being. As geographies are formed through spatial patterns, including the body, they can be un-created or re-created through movement of those patterns and spaces. To this question I will answer through an analysis of the spatiality and geographies of dance and its potential to open new

spaces - new stories – to black feminist geographies. Dance is explored as the affective and embodied practice of expression formed in between, in the liminal space. I will give an inquiry to dance's role in encounters and creating worlds as a lived body in relation to black feminist geographies.

**2.** How can embodied geographies locate black feminisms?

This question seeks to exemplify the expressional force of tracing black feminist geographies through their embodied spaces and materialities. I will demonstrate this through the work of black feminist geographies provided by Marlene Nourbese Philip (2017).

**3.** Can dance work as a non-representational tool to navigate feminist geographies?

Or can feminist theorizations be read through the NRT frame?

This question is mostly directed as a suggestion for future research and explores how non-representational and feminist geographical thought can inform one another in further detail. The methodology is to use different materialist understandings of subjectivity and space in non-representational theory to serve as a frame for feminist geographies and draw from artistic methods, such as dance. I will not go deep into this question in the forthcoming chapters, because I wish to try experimental methods to proceed with this in order to explore a non-representational research process. Nevertheless, this question was still one of the most important products of this research process and I will gather my thoughts regarding this at the end of this thesis.

Gradually, I found literature that inspired me and shifted my thinking to different directions. One of the first articles that resonated with me was *Music Videos as Black Feminist Thought – From Nicki Minaj's Anaconda to Beyoncé's Formation* by Katariina Kyrolä (2017). This article confirmed my own thoughts about understanding other forms of expression than academic writing as black feminist theory, which Kyrölä explores through Patricia Collins's (2000) work on black feminist thought. Another book worth mentioning is *Demonic Grounds* by geographer Katherine McKittrick (2006). This book secured my geographical aspirations and creative need to connect creative expression and space with black feminist thinking. Lastly,

when I found non-representational geographies, for example *Refrains for Moving Bodies* by Derek McCormack (2013) strengthened my frame of thinking on dance and added a strong discussant from a materialist perspective. Non-representational theories offer a participatory world view as a breathing, lived organism where all human and non-human matter is connected in assemblages. The nature of thinking as doing and a material understanding of the power of affect to geographical thinking gave me great inspiration and essential tools to think dance with black feminist geographies from an embodied perspective. My process started with the consideration of dance *as* black feminist theory but evolved, when the focus turned to the performative and embodied role of dance as animating black feminist experiences in the frame of non-representational theorization. These modes of thought complement each other through the embodiment of black feminist trajectories taking place through dance.

The narrative through this thesis follows my process of finding new aspects to understanding geographies. The empirical material, which I gathered in northeastern Brazil is introduced in the beginning of the thesis and sprinkled along in discussion with my theoretical framework and analyzed in more detail in the end of the thesis. First, I will introduce the central concepts relevant to this study, then methodologies and fieldwork in Brazil, followed by a theoretical discussion. In the final chapter, I gather the findings of this thesis and finally, reflect what I have learned and discovered along with thoughts for possible further research.

### 1.2. Central concepts of dance as non-representation and representation

Distinctions need to be made on how dance has been addressed in representational and non-representational theories due to the differing ontologies of these approaches. I will give a brief background to theorizations on dance and introduce central concepts relevant to this study.

### 1.3. Feminist approaches to dance

Feminist approaches to dance seek to reveal social markings inscribed through and onto dances and dancing bodies. This often includes a representational perspective of the dancing body that reflects prevalent social and cultural inscriptions of power. Embodied approaches to dance have received more attention in feminist theories in recent years (Thrift 2000: 237), but have often been targeted with significance – treating the body as a vessel to be filled with pre-determined, written meaning, which instrumentalizes the body to social constructions (Dempster 1995: 22).

In Western dance tradition, the dancing body has been considered feminine and subordinate, such as in ballet, which includes strict structural choreographies and performances that represent the mute, beautiful and fragile dancer (Dempster 1995: 25). Dance as praxis has reflected the Western view of the (female) body as a controlled entity not being able to produce new spaces and thoughts (Dempster 1995: 24). This implies that dance has been the tool to control and limit the body's spatial potential by keeping the practice in its place - as inferior and less valued (Dempster 1995: 24). This representation of dance as a displaced art form and de-spatialized dancing body, that are not able to produce relevant value or input, has rendered dance to co-exist only in relation to "male-identified art forms such as music and drama" (Dempster 1995: 24).

Non-western dance representations are often rendered as "ethnic art or folklore" from a Westernized point of view, which can result in othering or appropriating the dances and cultures, while the practitioners themselves would describe them as "lived art" (Interviewee four). Analyses of non-western dances and their meanings as rituals and symbols have been conducted especially in anthropology (Williams 2004).

Body movement has been discussed in feminist geography for example by Marion Young (2005: 27-45) on female spatial embodiment in throwing a ball, and in practice-based performance research on dance by Elizabeth Dempster's (1995: 21-36) and Karen Barbour's (2011: 35-36, 65-68) work on writing the body in dance as formulating its representations. Dance as text posits that bodies can be considered as texts written by and through socially marked bodies, which in turn indicates the possibility to form potential re-writings and re-imaginations of the social inscriptions of bodies through dance (Dempster 1995: 34).

Political approaches to dance have been on the rise in feminist thought. This is due to an increased understanding of the potential of an embodied outlook on dance as its own expression and practice, rather than viewing the dancing body only as a blank canvas to be inscribed by social and cultural norms (Thrift 2000: 237). However, perspectives on dance vary depending on the nature, form and situatedness of the dance and dancing bodies in question and whether the dance is choreographed or unstructured.

### 1.4. Non-representational approaches to dance

In this study, the focus is on unstructured, more improvisational dances and their role in spatial formation from a non-representational point of view. Non-representational theories consider dance as an embodied practice of expression which generates affective relations in space and time (McCormack 2013; Thrift 1997, 2000). Embodiment in this thesis is construed as the body's inseparable connection with the world in a non-cognitive way that evades a mind-body separation. The body in this understanding is a pre-discursive realm that in dance works as the lived body, thinking in movement through the senses. (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 146)

Thrift (1997: 143) views dance as a creative expression that eludes power structures through performing a fleeting, non-representational practice in movement that is not rendered to re-presentation. McCormack's (2013: 78-82) work has focused on rhythmical spacetimes to illustrate this elusive nature and potential of dance and its mappings in movement. These rhythmical spaces generate change and new spaces through affect of spatiotemporal turbulence (McCormack 2013: 42). His work formulates conceptualizations of these affective spacetimes that bodies participate in, which enable "generative abstraction in dance that

encloses thinking into the world while it draws out the affects of encounters within the world" (McCormack 2013: 5).

*The refrain* in NRT is considered a cross-cutting quality of affective spacetimes. The refrain is the repetitive 'chorus' of the world, working like a spiral, constantly coiling back onto itself in the process of moving forward while converging, expanding and canceling out worlds and returning as difference (McCormack 2013: 80-82). The nature of the refrain is spatial and beyond human; it is formed by pieces of spacetime, through which an expressive terrain of repetitive patterns emerges (McCormack 2013: 7-8). However, this momentum created by repetition is not static or fixed, but fundamentally an open process. This means that even though refrains are repetitive, they remain open to the unfamiliar and new, that is, in thoughts, senses and perceptions (McCormack 2013: 7-8). The refrains can be understood as virtual and plural "existential territories" within the spheres of "kinesthetic, conceptual, material and gestural" (Guattari 1996 in McCormack 2013: 8).

Refrains can filter affective potential of spaces comprised of bodies, concepts and objects (McCormack 2013: 15). This refers to the transformational force of the refrain - moving bodies cultivate this potential through which renewal and re-creation is possible. This affectual experience through dance creates an opening for the refrain's generative force to be extracted. This opening can mean an invocation of change, variation in thinking, feeling or ideas which the moving bodies produce by taking part in these affective spacetimes.

*Rhythm* is another component of affective spacetimes. In dance, rhythm conceptualizes the aesthetic and embodied experience through the body: "the body as a set of relations through which the spatiotemporal turbulence of everyday life registers as intensities of feeling through rhythmic relations" (Lefevbre 2004 in McCormack 2013: 42). This indicates that the body is viewed as a set of rhythmic relations, which engages the body in rhythmical assemblages. Through this understanding, rhythm is also identified as relational in terms of space and offers a way of thinking the daily life and practice through a ceaseless process of relations (McCormack 2013: 42). Rhythm marks variations in progress, that is, change and variation in rhythm is constant, which is formative for experiences and expressions to be produced - as a differentiation creating potential for change through expression (Dewey 1958 in McCormack 2015: 40). Rhythmic relations and spacetimes provide an ontological background of what spaces, objects and bodies are made of and epistemological insight in

how to participate and be affected by rhythmical spacetimes (Lefebvre in McCormack 2013: 41).

*Affect* is another important aspect of dance. McCormack (2013: 32-33) calls affective potential "a turbulent background field of relational intensity" which is not bound to specific subjects or bodies. "The affects of this field are radically autonomous – they are not contained by bodies" but can be felt in bodies, called "feelings of tendency" by William James (1950 in McCormack 2013: 33). In this understanding affect is a relational and embodied pre-cognitive domain through which one can affect and be affected. In dance, affect can be felt through the sensory realm of relations within and between bodies, which is induced in movement in how the body registers its steps and rhythm as guiding its directions, reactions and responses with other bodies. These concepts are central in formulating dance as engaging with black feminisms in this study and will be introduced in more detail in chapter 5.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Methods

The central goal of this study is to form a frame of dance as a space of black feminist geographies, which is primarily a theoretical task. The two empirical dance examples from Brazil will be used to illustrate key points of the theoretical discussion. Empirical interviews and theoretical discussion were the methods to structure this study. Empirical material serves as a pathway and guide for the theorization and will be analyzed in the final chapter. Empirical and theoretical frameworks were not planned or fixed with a preconceived or attempted outcome or purpose, rather they were formed in a processual manner. Empirical material consists six qualitative interviews conducted on dance in Brazil with afro-Brazilian women whom I met at dances in the area. The methodological approach to the material is a qualitative analysis of interviews.

## 2.2. Research ethics in feminist methodologies

Methodologies in feminist research emphasize situatedness, participatory methods and reflection during the research process, which makes the researcher as part of the process and places the researcher as 'a subject' as well (McDowell 1992: 405). Feminist methodologies in geography point out the debated notions on feminist methods, but a consensus is found on the notion of collaboration, where the goal is to reveal and address unequal power relations during the research process and between the researcher and informants (McDowell 1992: 405). This requires reflection on the researcher's and informants' positions and privileges and whose voice is heard. This also refers to reflection on how, where and by whom the data and knowledge is being produced, how it is being interpreted and by which set of values and power structures the researcher is framed by. Feminist research process thus do not strive to form universal truths, but to create new, often silenced experiences from a deeply reflective process (McDowell 1992: 406).

I tried to be aware of the biased downfalls of research and research ethics in feminist methodologies. At the core of feminist research ethics is that space and knowledge production is subjective and self-reflective, and the researcher is engaged with the subjects in dialogue on a common ground with them (McDowell 1992: 405-406). Intersubjectivity rather than objectivity is also at the core of feminist methodologies, but these tenets do raise ethical questions that need to be addressed. These include the position of the researcher as an insider, which might influence the (attempted) outcome of the research, thus potentially affecting vulnerable communities and informants. Another ethical issue is the notion of othering - as a white researcher, will your words and interpretation only strengthen stereotypes and difference? (McDowell 1992: 407-408). This is why in this study, I do not claim my words as the truth, but instead explore the role of dance in shaping women's spatial realities, not as a static, universal truth of all afro-Brazilian women - but a suggestion of alternative, imaginative geography. As knowledge is always situated and bound to power structures - including research –awareness of that is essential.

This thesis has required self-reflection of my position as a white woman studying black women, and I emphasize that it only suggests one perspective - story among many - about the research questions in this thesis. By trying to be aware of my own social frame of thinking,

I also wanted to use my privileged standpoint to create a window for a creative and marginalized geography in the hopes for equity and discussion in geography.

### 2.3. Non-representational methodologies

NRT methodologies vary greatly and there has been controversy, especially on the notion of performativity in research. There are no fixed methods, but qualitative methods, such as ethnography and in-depth interviews have been used. (Cadman 2009: 461) New methodologies have been created, such as performative ethnography and observing participation to understand the processual and transient nature of non-representational research (Cadman 2009: 461). They seek to be political through engaging with the notion of being and present time and tend toward an academic style which seeks to "describe and present rather than diagnose and represent" (Cadman 2009: 461). This refers to engaging with the underlying, affectual relations that precede cognition in the sphere of politics and ethics. NRT methodologies seek to grasp these non-linear, lived spaces of being by exploring expressive practices for example, which can provide potential political means for creative action. These measures attempt to present a world beyond its filtered shield by conjuring the virtual and material realm and exploring it through creative research methods. I use NRT methodology when I analyze the empirical material of dance through a non-representational perspective as an affective and generative practice of expression.

### 2.4. Structure of research

Theoretical discussion draws from feminist and non-representational theories. Black feminist theories will serve as a basis for the theoretical discussion and progress to introducing non-representational theories, which open a wider scope for the discussion of the core themes in this study on dance. Non-representational theorization is used for interpreting the empirical data in the analysis chapter. The theories are thus unfolded in a layered manner which relations are discussed along the study.

The study begins with a presentation of the fieldwork in Brazil as a pathway to the theoretical discussion of dance as space for black feminisms. I will present the background of the two

dances and describe my fieldwork experience. The theoretical discussion will begin by a background of black feminist theoretical framework and its role in geography. From here I move on to opening the frame of embodied and creative theories in black feminisms by McKittrick (2006), Collins (2000) and Philip (2017), which will work as a bridge to the introduction of NRT theorization and the discussion of dance and embodiment in non-representational geographies. Dance as an embodied and creative practice will be analyzed through work by theorists such as Thrift (1997, 2000), McCormack (2013) and Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (1999), which will help shed more light on the role of dance's expressive and generative nature and its meaning to black feminisms. After the body of theory, I will continue from the fieldwork chapter and analyze the two dances' interview material and background in more detail through the theoretical frame, which answers the main research question: How can dance locate black feminist geographies? The empirical material serves as a pathway of dance to black feminist geographies and joins the them together.

## 3. Fieldwork in Brazil

This research began with my field work in Brazil. I chose to go to the state of Pernambuco, because it has a long colonial and indigenous history, and along with the state of Bahia it has one of the highest populations of afro-Brazilians. In Pernambuco, there are relics of Portuguese and Dutch colonies, which have since formed the famous mixture of races, ethnicities and cultural traditions in Brazil. (Afolabi 2009: 1-9) Most of my time was spent at a Unesco heritage site of Olinda, where I interviewed women that I met at samba dances in the Old town area where I was living. Olinda is the second oldest town of Brazil, and it used to be a strong slave economy and is now one of the most well-preserved colonial sites. The old town area is small and has a lot of artist residencies, and the community has a strong cultural heritage with African influenced dances. Olinda is famous for its own traditional carnival of music and dances, which is where most of its income comes from. (Unesco 2020)

Six interviews were conducted at two different dances, funk and samba de coco (coco), which were located in different places. Sambas de coco were always located in a separate building or space in the old town area of Olinda with live music. Funk dances were located in clubs and

street parties in the nearest city of Recife and danced even without music at beaches. I chose these six women, because when I told them what I was doing there, they seemed very eager and interested to participate in the interviews. All the women identified themselves as afro-Brazilian, danced coco and funk and shared similar feminist values. Thus, I did not assume all afro-Brazilian women living in Brazil were feminists, but these women told me themselves to be proud afro-Brazilian feminists. Nor did I choose women according to any specific or strict categories, rather the women whom I met wanted to participate in this study to share their experiences. In addition to the interviews, I danced with the women myself, and reflected on the experiences afterwards. I also asked myself all the interview questions, which were not fixed, rather the women could tell me freely about the core themes which included the meaning of these dances to them, black femininity, body and selfhood. All the interviewees said they felt this was an important study to be a part of.

My research plan was not static and set before I arrived, instead it unfolded while I was there for three months. The interviews were performed in a fluid manner with open dialogue. The goal was to avoid creating a distorted or generalized image of afro-Brazilian women's lives or dance but describe their experiences in an unstructured manner. I wanted to harness the common practices of dance in these women's everyday lives and how it contributes to their sense of being with the world. Some of the women's quotations are inserted as earmarks along the theoretical discussion of the thesis.

I picked two Brazilian dance styles which were popular in these areas of Brazil. It needs to be noted, that even though I decided to focus on these two dance styles, the forthcoming theoretical discussion on dance is not exclusively to be reserved only to these dances but could be applied to other dance styles.

### 3.1. Samba de Coco and Funk

Funk and samba de coco are both part of a continuity of afro-Brazilian heritage and geographies of existing traditions, dances and music of the African diaspora. Both dances share similar elements by using different means and neither of the dances exclude whiteness but offer a platform for black feminist spatial politics – beyond the lines of transparent, white spaces.

The tradition of samba de coco dance and music style developed during the slave period on the plantations and quilombos in the coastal region in Northeast of Brazil, when work songs of the slaves were accompanied by percussive rhythms (Sharp 2014: ix-xi). There are many forms of samba, but samba de coco is identified as the antecedent style and legacy of the afro-Brazilians, which combines relaxed and fluid bodily movements with complex and powerful rhythmic breaks and spacing (Sharp 2014: ix-xi). Samba in its many styles is the official music and dance of the Brazilian carnival with its roots in West-Africa, especially in Angola and Congo as a remnant from the slave trade (Browning 1995: 25-27). The coco is typically danced in a circular formation alone or with a partner and there is less touching between bodies. The live rhythmical music lays the foundation to the highly communal and dynamic dance events of coco. It has stayed as a more marginal and traditional music and dance style in northeastern Brazil. The dances often happen spontaneously in low-key, communal yet welcoming spaces where traditional lyrics and music of samba de coco are sung and played along the dances.

Funk is a more modern electronic street dance originally formed in the favelas in Rio de Janeiro within afro-Brazilian communities with provocative, political lyrics about race, gender and discrimination. The music style has influences from dancehall, twerk and reggaeton from other Latin American countries, where the music also traditionally has similar political messages carried with dynamic and powerful bass rhythms in the background. Funk dance style has been regarded as a black feminist political movement and is danced widely in Brazil, on the streets, clubs, bars and beaches by mostly women, as its trademark style invites a highly sexual and provocative interpretation by the dancer. (Moreira 2017: 177) There are popular funk music videos presenting women twerking and dancing in an extremely physical, sensual and provocative manner, which are often sung along with rap lyrics. Even though funk dance has been considered a political resistance movement, it can also be viewed as an embodied expression of transgression (Moreira 2017: 176) from the margins, which addresses class differences and heterofemininity and their relation to racial and gender questions in Brazil.

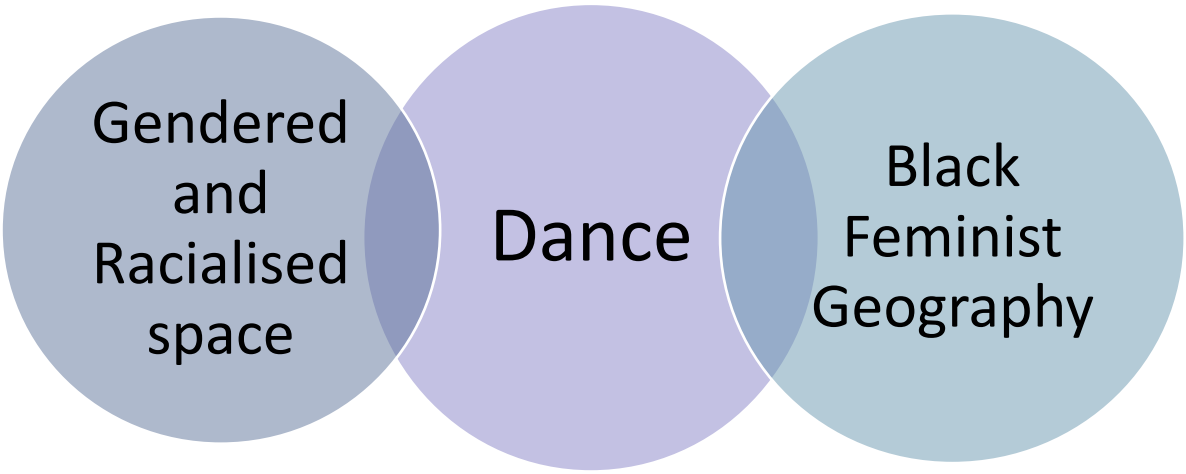


Figure 1. My preliminary mindmap. Dance in the middle presents the moving and affecting force of racialized and gendered space in black feminist geography.

## 4. Black feminist geographies

Black feminist geographies are not homogeneous but include multilayered approaches in disclosing racialized and gendered relations, experiences and struggle. The focus of this study is on creative and experimental methods to understand different ontologies and epistemologies on the material body and spaces. This requires a shift away from linguistic, conceptual thought to material means to locate black feminist geographies through dance and embodiment (Anderson & Harrison 2010: 6-7). I will introduce black Brazilian feminisms and black feminist geographies on how more embodied understandings of the body, geography and experience can help in re-locating black geographies from their social and cultural meanings. The emphasis is thus on expressive black feminist geographies and re-articulating how we understand spatial ontology of dance and the dancing body as a generative force to re-create those geographies.

Critical geographies such as black feminist, Marxist, post-colonial, post-structural approaches derive from different methodological, ontological and epistemological standpoints but share an ideological goal to reveal "socio-spatial processes that (re)-produce inequalities between people and places" (Hubbard 2011: 492). As geography's origins derive from European colonial expansion, along with its kin anthropology, and evolved to a product of Eurocentric enlightenment based on racialized hierarchy (Livingstone 1992: 216-220; Kobayashi 1994: 226-227), geographers and anthropologists had a significant role in the scientific enlightenment and the representation of the non-Western communities. Black feminist geographies have resulted from these exploitative spatial power relations between the dichotomy of the oppressors and oppressed (Cresswell 2013: 270-272). This legacy today is visible as the absence of black feminist geographical scholarship due to Eurocentricity, and the lack of geography taking race and racism into account – causing invisibilization of black geographies and marginalization within the discipline caused by institutional structures in academia (Collins 2000: 12-17; Cresswell 2013: 270-272).

Colonialism and transatlantic slavery largely contributed to black feminist, decolonial and critical race studies. Eurocentric hierarchies along with scientific enlightenment and eugenics ranked the European, white male as the norm, number one in the hierarchy, and other

genders and races secondary, therefore it was rendered natural to exploit them. This *naturalization* engendered a dualistic, positivist thinking which includes the division of the mind/body, object/subject or masculine/feminine, which paralleled with creating an us and Them -narrative and politics of difference. (Kobayashi 1994: 227) These gendered and racialized relations have been analyzed critically by black feminist theorists (e.g. McKittrick 2006; Collins 2000; hooks 1984) with the goal of (re)spatializing the patriarchal and racist spaces in the hopes of emancipatory politics. Feminist works have addressed the spatial and historical trajectories of the dominate and the marginalized, with an emphasis on situated knowledges and experiences. Feminist and black feminist geographers have been some of the leading thinkers of the socially and culturally constructed world, which renders power, gender and racial relations as artificially produced and maintained (Cresswell 2013: 147-170).

### 4.1. Black Brazilian feminism

*"Chegou a nossa vez, agora os tornados objetos, as invisíveis, vao falar*

*Our time has come, now the objects, the invisible ones, will speak"*

(Gonzales in Williams 2015: 106)

To Lelia Gonzales (1984 in Williams 2015: 107) black Brazilian feminism differs from Western, white feminism due to its sense of "solidarity, founded in a common colonial and historical experience", which refers to the inclusion of experiences of racism among afro-Brazilian men as well. Activism and non-academic knowledge production in addition to academic theories have been crucial to the formulation of black feminist thought and theory in Brazil. While the women's movement did not take racial relations into account, the black movement created a space for political awareness and dialogue about racism and class segregation in Brazil (Williams 2015: 107). Jurema Werneck's (Sebastião 2010: 71 in Williams 2015: 108 ) notion on black feminisms confirms the inseparable intertwinement of gender and race: "diasporic, post-colonial, post-slavery anchored in race, and understanding gender as a mode in which race is lived, we can affirm that race defines the way of being black women and men."

The roots of black Brazilian feminist thought go back to colonial history when Brazilian myths of racial democracy and "colorblind erotic democracy" were formulated (Williams 2015: 105).

In black Brazilian feminist thought there is a need to look through the diasporic lens of historic racial eroticism entwined with the perception and representation of afro-Brazilian women (Afolabi 2009: 171-174), which is reflected in Brazil's cultural image as sensuous and exotic. Afro-Brazilian women have been represented in the west with a "wild and untamed sexuality" which is paralleled with the naturalization of exoticization of racialized Brazilian women (Williams 2015: 104). Representations of black women change with space; in public space they carry a notion related to pleasure and excitement as a performer, such as a samba dancer, whereas in private/domestic space they are connected with domestic work (Williams 2015: 104).

The sexualized afro-Brazilian woman has historically been called *the mythical mulata*, while afro-Brazilian domestic women workers were called *mucama* during the colonial period (Williams 2015: 103, 109). To Gonzales (1998 in Williams 2015: 106), afro-Brazilian women's representation as the mulata can be traced back to when they were viewed as "animalized bodies, the sexual beasts of burden". By this she refers to the dehumanization of mulatas, that is, their bodies were to be enjoyed but not to be respected like a white woman's body.

The representations of the mulata and mucama in brazil have been formative in building the image of afro-brazilian women. They are visible in images, literature, music, movies, media and arts and have stayed as persistent themes in black Brazilian feminist works. The effects of these representations are significant considering how afro-Brazilian women's representations are reflected in the Brazilian society, as the education and income levels are still lower among black women than white women and men (IPEA 2011; Minority Rights Group International 2020).

The racialized figure of the "cinnamon-colored mulata" presents "a classic example of how the black body has been an object of economic exploitation, sexual desire and political domination throughout Brazilian history" (Williams 2015: 103, 109). The image of the mulata emerged in the 1930's as a cultural "export" as the Brazilian representation of the blended nature of the country after slavery (Williams 2015: 109).

Sociologist Gilberto Freyre developed a known Brazilian proverb in his ethnographies:

"*branca para casar, mulata para foder, negra para trabalhar': White women for marriage, mulata for fornication, black women for working"*

(Freyre 1983 in Williams 2015: 109)

This describes the historical legacy of the hierarchy of sexualized bodies of black women in Brazil. Caldwell (2007: 60) states that the term mulata has gained the meaning of a prostitute within many European men who travel to Brazil for sexual purposes. This representation was also visible in the stories Brazilian women told me – they had been frequently mistaken for sex workers walking on the street, as *mulheres na calle*, or as domestic workers, as if assumed to be tied to one role or the other. Gonzales suggests, that "black women were put on this planet to serve" (Barbosa 2010 in Williams 2015: 109-110) and has also claimed that the "liberation of white women resulted in the continued subordination of black women as domestic workers" (Caldwell 2000 in Williams 2015: 108). It has been debated how the history of miscegenation and issues of race and color categorization have given Brazil a type of shield against racism as "a racial democracy". The color categorization refers to the wide spectrum of different skin color schemes established throughout Brazilian development and history. (Caldwell 2007: 32, 41)

In 1975 at the congress of Brazilian women a group of women formulated the Black Women's Manifesto which posits the following:

"The Black Brazilian women have received a cruel heritage: to be the objects of pleasure of the colonizers. The fruit of this cowardly crossing of blood is what now is acclaimed and proclaimed as the only national product that deserves to be exported: The Brazilian Mulata. But if the quality of the product is said to be so high, the treatment that she receives is extremely degrading, dirty and disrespectful" (Nascimento 1978: 62 in Williams 2015: 109).

The black manifesto marks the birthplace of a pivotal contribution by black women of revealing the true representation of the mulata. The black manifesto places mulatas as black women or racially mixed women, which means that mulatas and negras share similar representations in the "myth of hypersexuality as the eroticized image of the mulata woman". (Williams 2015: 110). Drawing from my interview material, the term negra was widely used among the women, but it was framed by ownership and self-definition, to counter it as a racial-sexualized representation of the afro-Brazilian woman.

Through association with social movements, black Brazilian feminism has been institutionalized to NGO's and there is continual lack of black women in the academia

(Barbosa 2010 in Williams 2015: 108). As a result, black feminist thought has had a thematic focus of critique on academic feminism, and in turn has produced activism and arts by practitioners in the margins. Many black feminist movements have been developed within communities of music and dance in the favelas and quilombos (Moreira 2017: 177). Collectively acclaimed black female intellectual figures and black feminist epistemologies have been distinguished within afro-Brazilian or African American music communities for example, such as samba in Brazil or blues in the US (Collins 2000: 106). As Collins (2000: 251-254) states, that it needs to be acknowledged that black women outside of academia have long functioned as intellectuals and respected contributors to black feminist thought, such as the poet Maya Angelou and singer Nina Simone in the US, or singer Celia Cruz in Cuba, or actress Zeze Motta in Brazil by locating the invisibilized spaces of black women.

### 4.2. Black feminist spaces

To McKittrick, spaces, geographies and black feminisms are inseparably entwined. Her work (2006: xxvi), is "intended to raise questions about the ground beneath our feet, how we are all implicated in the production of space, and how geography - in its various formations - is integral to social struggles."

McKittrick argues that black feminist geographies should be reviewed beyond the representational frame, because they are often rendered *only* to a conceptual realm rather than understood through what she has called the "imbrication of material and metaphoric space" (2006: xiii, xx). She calls for a conceptual analysis of the interconnectedness of metaphorical and material spaces, that is, in black feminist theory, marginalized bodies are often portrayed only as conceptual or metaphoric rather than as entwined spaces of material and embodied humanness and struggle. By this she refers to the lived geographic processes that take place underneath and throughout black feminist politics. Like Collins's (2000: 13-14, 253-254; Kyrölä 2017) call for other forms of expression than academic ones to be regarded as black feminist theory, McKittrick (2006: xxiii- xxiv) suggests holistic and imaginative approaches to black feminist geographies. Instead of solely relying on classic black feminist theories found in the *Black Feminist Reader*, she calls for the importance of arts as expressive black feminist geographies (McKittrick 2006: 54, 60, 21-22). McKittrick's call emphasizes the importance of spatializing of black feminist thought and black expressive

practices to formulate visible, traceable black feminist spaces and geographies. Kyrölä (2017: 1-10) has drawn from this through an analysis of music videos as black feminist thought by reflecting them through central tenets of black feminisms. These claims thus call for a mapping of marginalized, hidden experiences and knowledges, which are often left concealed.

McKittrick's work points out that transatlantic slavery (2006: x-xv) has had a major role in producing embodied black geographies. She draws from Neil Smith's (1984 in McKittrick 2006: 15) notion of *deep space* and Glissant's (1989 in Mckittrick 2006: xxi- xxii) *poetics of landscape*, which provide an opening of addressing processes of space production through the material and metaphorical geographies embedded as intertwined spatial configurations, rather than separating them as fixed separate spaces. McKittrick uses deep space and poetics of landscape to re-imagine black feminist spatial inequalities and struggles to spatialize displaced black feminisms. Her work formulates black women's geographies in the black diaspora through a combination of geography and black studies in creative ways.

McKittrick's work focuses on the sense of place being different in the black diaspora and reality. She claims that geography has been colonized by white, Eurocentric masculinity, which she calls "rational spatial colonization and domination: the profitable erasure and objectification of subaltern subjectivities, stories and lands" (McKittrick 2006: x, 10). She illustrates the notion of black space as a slave ship through the black Atlantic representing an enveloping of material and symbolic space (McKittrick 2006: x-xi). The displacement of the African diaspora, including Brazil, has a strong interconnection to geography:

"Arises out of diasporic populations existing partly inside and not always against the grand narrative of Enlightenment and its organizing principles; principles that include the naturalization of identity and place, the spatialization of racial hierarchies, the displacement of difference, ghettos, prisons, crossed borders, and sites of resistance and community" (Gilroy 1993 in McKittrick 2006: xxi).

To McKittrick, the history of geography has thus been marked and mapped by white masculinity, while black geographies try to remap it from a displaced space. She focuses especially on the interconnections between geographies of domination, such as the slave trade and racial-sexual displacement, and black women's geographies; their knowledges,

negotiations and experiences. This indicates, that the re-spatialization of these historio-corporeal trajectories are formative to how we understand current black feminist geographies. But most importantly, this approach places the black subject in the diaspora with a specific spatial history, which in turn places the formulation of current (traditional) geographies under scrutiny. (McKittrick 2006: 9-15)

The concept of *transparent space* has been discussed especially by Gillian Rose (Blunt & Rose 1994: 6) in feminist geography, which questions the assumption that what you see in space is conceived and experienced the same way by everyone. To McKittrick, transparent space produces unequal socio-spatial processes and maintains processes of naturalization: "inequality is blazoned into the geographical landscape . . . for certain socially determined ends" (Smith 1984 in Mckittrick 2006: 6). She continues to describe black geographies as the following: "subaltern or alternative geographic patterns that work alongside and beyond traditional geographies and site a terrain of struggle" (2006: 6-7). She posits that "traditional geographies did, and still do require black displacement, black placelessness, black labor, and a black population that submissively stays in place" (2006: 9). This has resulted in the central spatial tenets of black feminist geographies aligning with otherness, displacement and an emphasis on embodied experiences and knowledges.

To McKittrick (2006: 15-16), the shortages within traditional geographic theories and practices reveal the need for input from outside of the discipline to address new ways how race takes space. This indicates a need for an entrance through material space with conceptual means. Dance is one of the spatial practices that can serve as an embodied, material opening to geographic discussion to (re)locate dislocated or invisible spaces. Glissant's (1989 in McKittrick 2006: xxi-xxii) work on the poetics of landscape comprises narratives through expressive acts such as poetry, fiction and plays, which embody black women's spaces. These acts enforce the potential of creative expressions underlying existing spatial formulations and offer means to critique the frames established by transatlantic slavery in re-locating feminisms through creating pathways through the lines of traditional geographic knowledges. Black women's expressive practices can be understood to re-position the spatial frames of struggle that cannot be traced through linear lines of spatiotemporality, but rather are formed in the spaces between in a mutable manner. These ceaseless

geographies are active producers of reality evolved through time and space as material and historical narratives.

To McKittrick (2006: 52-57), the *Margin* introduced by bell hooks (1984) is the place where geography and black feminism meet. hooks describes the margin as the place of dispossession of racialized and gendered black female bodies and claims it as a place of resistance that "talks back" to territorialization – re-locating the body by taking place (1984 in McKittrick 2006: 55-56). This space provides a frame through which to review assemblages of black feminist spaces. Through this concept black feminisms are embodied in the margins and are constantly aligned with spatial politics (McKittrick 2006: 54). This is evident in black women's role in spatial politics as they have been rendered to the margins of knowledge and have therefore been "imagined as outside of the production of space" (McKittrick 2006: 54). This implies, that the margin reveals the place between imagined, metaphorical and "real" spaces of black feminisms, and in turn helps to locate disparities through that in-between space. McKittrick (2006: 55) states, that "margin-politics are underacknowledged geographies bound up in embodiment, metaphor, knowledge, and ownership", which underline geographies of marginalized black feminist experiences. By this she indicates the situatedness of black women hinged by a legacy of racism and sexism, which is re-formulated as a politics of embodied experiences and expressions.

The margin shows a political geography that "simultaneously marks place and takes place" (McKittrick 2006: 55), locating black femininity while disclosing black spatial politics founded on marginalized historical experiences of racial-sexualized women. There is criticism towards the margin as well, typically read as too theoretical, "a flattened theorized space" (Collins 2000 in McKittrick 2006: 57) of not claiming true embodied, lived experiences of subaltern groups. To McKittrick (2006: 58), the reason the margin is so often rendered as imagined *is* due to its marginalized demographies. When read like this, the margin is "not a legitimate area of deep social or geographic inquiry—it is a site of dispossession, it is an ungeographic space, it is all too often a fleeting academic utterance and therefore easy to cast out, ignore, and only bring it back to the discussion in times of multicultural crises" (McKittrick 2006: 58). This is at the core of McKittrick's work: calling attention to how marginalized spaces need to be addressed as embodied, geographically lived spaces, which requires a re-articulation of traditional geographical mappings.

Margins should thus converse with experiential ways of being among black women. This implies, that while the margin locates the black female body, at the same time it is rendered conceptual rather than a site of humanness and struggle. To rethink black feminist geographies, attention needs to be directed to "art, fictional geographies, activist spaces, musics, poetry, and most importantly - to remember that these creative and theoretical spaces are not just words, images, or ideas; they locate real social struggles" (McKittrick 2006: 60). McKittrick's work presents, that black feminist spaces are not only hierarchical, colonial patterns or spatial restrictions of black bodies and processes of marginalization. The key is rather to focus on re-imagining black geographies and what they can reveal of prevailing paradigms of geographies.

### 4.3. Embodied black feminist geographies

Embodied approaches to black feminisms can be considered as creative outlets to engage with material, hidden geographies through affect via artistic or expressive methods. Embodied black feminist geographies entangle racial-sexual histories and provide a window to the present spatial arrangements of black feminisms. McKittrick calls these black feminist geographies as "the last place they thought of; unconventional geographies of black femininity that are not necessarily marginal, but central to how we know and understand space and place: black women's geographies are workable and lived subaltern spatialities, which tell a different geographic story" (2006: 62).

As concluded in the previous chapter, the legacy of the black diaspora is assembled through bodily and racial spaces (McKittrick 2006: 44). The body marks the heritage of transatlantic slavery, black displacement and racial violence, which was based on a beneficial market for the owners. This legitimized the use of the slaves' bodies as goods to take advantage of – making them "an embodied property" (McKittrick 2006: 44). This racial-sexual confinement locates the embodied trajectories of black geographies and is visible today in the representation, dislocation and dispossession of black women's geographies. The territorialization of black women's bodies was sexualized and naturalized, which rendered them subordinate, usable objects, as McKittrick (2006: 44-45) states:

"Territorialization marks and names the scale of the body, turning ideas that justify bondage into corporeal evidence of racial difference. Once the racial-sexual body is territorialized, it is marked as decipherable and knowable – as subordinate, inhuman, rape-able, deviant, procreative, placeless, is made known through her bodily markings."

This geographical ownership demonstrates the interlinkages of body, land and geography, which is disclosed of viewing black female bodies as public available property to be conquered as well. McKittrick's understanding of black women's bodily geographies is thus paralleled with landscape territorialization, such as colonialism and slavery of black women and now with the hidden spaces within the black feminist diaspora. This relation between geography and black women reveals a paradigm of an embodied and corporeal geography. It also shows what kind of new geographies have been formed in between and through these relations - a bodily landscape which reflects its violent past.

Marlene NourbeSe Philip has addressed embodied geographies in her poetic essay *Dis place –The Space Between* (2017: 252-253). Philip views black female bodies tied to spatial patterns and calls attention to the *place* of the black body – the space between (Philip 2017: 251-254, 266). Philip fleshes out lineages and interconnections of poetic and material geographies through showing and locating black feminisms within and outside the black female body. Philip emphasizes the lived, experiential way that race and gender are manifested through the body, which traces the path to social patterns and spaces of embodied black feminisms.

Philip determines the black female body as a relational place of historio-corporeal remnants that re-create new stories through the place in between the legs. She analyzes black women's geographies through formulating the place between the legs as a racial-sexual merchandise to be used. Philip opens the space in between legs as an embodied space which invites analytical assessment of the gendered and racialized relations by locating them in an assemblage of embodied geographies – to be found in the space in between. Philip manages to frame a geography of gender and racial categories by revealing the naturalization and fabrication of them in space and time. She recognizes the place in between as a space with potential to identify, disrupt and re-imagine embodied black feminisms. Her insightful essay gives the invisible liminal space a carnal form through connecting bodily, historical and poetic layers of encounters – which have the potential to locate and re-imagine the relations themselves. This shows that, even though black women have a certain sexualized and

racialized history as objectified bodies, they also have agency in creating geographies through and within these violent geographies of domination. She illustrates this in her words:

"THE BODY - *which is to talk about the space that lies between the legs of the female and the effect of this space on the outer space —"place."* (Philip 2017: 252)

*"Unlike all other arrivals before or since, when the African comes to the New World, she comes with nothing. But the body. Her body. The body—repository and source of everything needed to survive in any but the barest sense. Body memory bodymemory"* (Philip 2017: 266).

Philip gives the place between the legs a space by producing it, that is, visibilizing the hidden space by connecting it with the historio-social geography of racial and gendered naturalization it represents. She places the body with historical events while locating it in time and space through bodymemory. This can be understood as a set of relations and layers of social and material experiences, which envelop embodied patterns of spatiotemporal corporealities. Philip traces the historio-racial realm to the body and cultivates it the space in between through body silence which she describes as follows:

*"silence shapes*
*that space*
*between*
*inner and outer*
*the space between*
*the legs*
*c(o)unt/ours*
*of silence*
*the outer space of text*
*borders on the*
*inner space*
*my body"*
(Philip 2017: 273)

*“silence is*
*silence is*
*silence is*
*the sound, the very sound between the words,*
*in the interstices of time divided by the word*
*between*
*outer and inner*
*space /silence*
*is*
*the boundary “*
(Philips 2017: 261)

This silenced bodyspace is in the liminal space that locates the narrative of the black female body: it is engrained in violent landscapes, but as a spatialized body through embodiment has the potential to shape those spaces. The space between the legs was commodified from the outside, thus Philip redefines it through the body by addressing the historio-racial space of the space between the legs by giving it a form, a shape, through time and space. This articulation of embodied spacetimes questions the sexualized inscriptions and gives the space a new ontology through the racialized notion itself, that is, the racialized notion is used as a force to disrupt and form subjectivities *through* space between the legs to the outside. At its core, the meaning of the space between the legs is a physical domination in history, but it also produces new black feminist spaces through the body:

*“silence is*
*silence is*
*silence is*
*body and*
*text*
*text and*
*body filaments of silence holding them together*
*Text Body Silence*
*Earth Sound Silence*

*EarthSilenceSoundBodyText*" (Philip 2017: 266)

The silence presents the continuum and birth of the black woman through the space between – the liminal space between which leads to the silenced body located. This liminal space of between the legs is the site between oppression and embodied space which Philip offers as the pathway of recreation of the black female body and history. These racialized and gendered corporeal spacetimes have been produced through socio-spatial patterns of text, representations and dislocation, which Philip fleshes out as as bodysilence and bodymemory. She gives the body a flesh, a place, by locating the very space between the legs as the birthplace of the dislocation of the black body. The undressing of fabricated social construction and racial-sexual identity by giving it a space, a geography of potential is formed through the liminal embodied space of the body that can be altered. This way, the space in between, re-defines the body not only linguistically but gives it a place in geographical history.

Philip demonstrates how silence within the space between the legs composes a spatial opening of transformation. The inner space and outer space boundaries create an encounter through which a changeable space of bodily silence can emerge. She shows that both inner and outer spaces are made rather than completed. This means that the space in between the legs - the silenced bodyspace – is mutable. This shows that the space between the legs, can transform geographies by positioning the silenced, displaced place to the visible eye, which in turn places black feminisms in history.

Philip's text Dis Place – The Space Between can be read as an expression that bends and expands spatiotemporal boundaries. Philip combines text, body and space and analytically describes the boundaries formed between and through them, which weaves the assemblage of black feminine bodies' historio-corporeal stories through a beyond representational ontology. She identifies the inseparable connection of black feminist histories and material geographies within landscapes of embodiment demonstrated in bodymemories. Her notion of bodies can thus be read as spatial bodypatterns, spatial imprints – which would indicate that body movement could alter or create new spatial memories and patterns.

Philip's work calls attention to the placelessness of black women and the importance of spatial, embodied politics. This placelessness came up in my interviews as well, as one woman

said: *"It [dance] gives me back my own expression and place"* (Interviewee three). This shows that the body marks the external place to come back to, by inhabiting and negotiating it. This way, the hidden black feminine spaces are unfolding *because* of the racial-sexualized lines of the body, which enable the reconfiguration of the space between the legs.

McKittrick's and Philips's work provide suggestions of embodied geographies which call attention to the spatiality of black feminisms by revealing the gaps in conventional geographies. As McKittrick (2006: 52) says: "the spatial and bodily remnants of transatlantic slavery are unresolved." These unresolved geographies are visible as struggles, which locate the silences of normative spaces. The body embodies the relation between black women and geography by revealing the landscape of struggle which is demonstrated through multilayered poetic geographies. These embodied spaces of expression are filtered through a political and spatialized place where they have always been, but not seen. As McKittrick reminds us of the spatiality of black feminist geographies: "Bodily geographies are not only unfinished and incomplete; they must have a place" (2006: 53).

Through the space "in between" black feminisms have produced creative works of narratives, theories and politics which are enfolded in space and time. These practices demonstrate the responses and struggles to racial-sexual categorizations which connects them inseparably to an active formation of spaces and underlying embodied forces.

### 4.4. Summary

In chapter four I have given an introduction to black feminist theorization and its relationship with geography. The previous chapter has provided an essential part to this study by answering *what are* black feminist spaces and how they can be formulated in relation to embodiment and geography. But this is only half of this study's primary task, which is to understand how these spaces of black feminisms can be re-located through dance. I will use a material and embodied perspective to re-create black feminisms by drawing from non-representational theorization done on dance. As stated, a shift away from representational theories is necessary in order to access these perspectives. That is, it is important to look beyond representational thinking and look what non-representational geographies offer to

elaborate theorization on dance, embodiment and their role in re-thinking black feminist geographies. This will glue this study's conceptual frame together and answer its main research question which is: how can dance locate black feminist geographies?

In the next chapter, I will introduce non-representational geographies which bridge dance to black feminist theorization.

## 5. Non-representational geographies

Non-representational geographies were initiated by Thrift (1997, 2000, 2008) after social constructivism in the 1980's and 90's to serve as a means to go beyond representational theorization from a relational-materialist perspective. Non-representational or rather "more than representational" theories owe a lot of thinking to post-structuralist frame in its embrace of relationality and critique of structural determination, but it sought to go further, beyond representationalism and explore non-human, virtual materialisms where the focus is on matter and affect in the *background* of representation of life (Anderson & Harrison 2010: 5, 7). NRT offers a regime of thought that cannot be reduced to a signifying language and questions the production of the world only in representational terms, which renders it somewhat defined and fixed (Anderson & Harrison 2010: 6). This regime opens a frame to think black feminist geographies in alternative and material ways through dance.

As social constructivism draws from a humanistic and individual notion to understand *meanings* of the world, non-representational theory provides a more materialist frame of the human and non-human derived largely from Deleuzian and Latourian thinking (Anderson & Harrison 2010: 2-3, 17, 104). It seeks to re-articulate the artificially constructed divide of the "real" world and constructed world to understand the processual and performative practices and affect in doing, through a notion of human as material and between the material and human (Anderson & Harrison 2010: 6-7). However, the virtual and actual worlds are equally real, one doesn't exist without the other, that is, it is their differences themselves which create the generation of the world together in the liminal space: where a constant dividing and expanding of worlds cause the very cancellation of those worlds and renewal of others (Doel in Anderson & Harrison 2010: 122). This refers to the relational process of which bodies, objects and things are a part of: an assemblage, where subjects are always foreshadowed and moulded by beyond representational forces in which they are embedded. This places the human and action as enfolded in the ceaseless spiral of repetitive relations that calibrates itself again and again through variations and differentiations in the pre-cognitive realm (Anderson & Harrison 2010: 7). Through this understanding, NRT brings the virtual realm closer by removing its *re-presentational* shield of "second comings" and finding a common

ground within the process of the actual and virtual working together (Doel in Anderson & Harrison 2010: 120). In contrast to representational subjectivities formed through individuality, non-representational understanding sees them as emerging through these external entanglements with the world in a liminal way. This is particularly essential to the view on human agency, as in NRT it is not produced individually, but through relational encounters with the world, with human and non-human bodies in motion, as an ongoing ever-changing process. (Thrift 1997: 136)

This brings us to the "eventuality" of the world in NRT, which works as contextual refrains, repetitions, in allowing potential to happen through the generative process of the worlds making and re-making themselves (Anderson & Harrison 2010: 19). Event refers to things emerging, happening or taking form which have multiple possibilities of how they take place, depending on the context. An event draws from the understanding of the world as composed of repetition and reform, not reproduction of pre-determined sameness (Anderson & Harrison 2010: 20-22). The event addresses this creative force of the product of difference in the process of making of the worlds (Doel in Anderson & Harrison 2010: 120-121). The process of the event can be described as diverging or differing continually which can lead to unforeseen change and transformation (Anderson & Harrison 2010: 20). However, an event requires constrains to happen: "Events must take place within networks of power which have been constructed precisely in order to ensure iterability, but event does not end with these bare facts" (Thrift 2000: 217). By this Thrift refers to the surprising aspects and encounters of life which counter the completeness of moments. Boundaries are thus needed to the repeatability of the potential of the event to emerge, which indicates a power which lies in the relations between constrains and unpredictability: boundaries induce creation and vice versa. To Thrift, the world has a momentary nature which needs to be acted upon through events (2000: 217). This means that the world is being formulated of unpredictable moments which create affects and consequently circumstances which are yet unknown.

Another important aspect of non-representational theory is affect. To Anderson (2006 in Cresswell 2013: 230) affect is a "product of relations between things", and differs from emotion, which is a socially constructed, personal state of mind. Affects come before emotion rendering emotions as learned 'guesses' based on social experience through which affects are given a meaning, which turns them into appropriate emotions. Affects thus derive from a non-

cognitive, collective place through relations in and between bodies which resonate with a 'body-feeling", such as before identifying an emotion, a pressure in the chest when you're anxious or a sudden jolt in the heart when you're surprised or frightened. The shared nature of affect in dance is evident to McCormack as an "affective quality of the space in which bodies dance is never only something personal – it is a product of a complex mix between things" (2008 in Cresswell 2013: 230) and "a distributed and diffuse field of intensities, circulating within but also moving beyond and around bodies" (McCormack 2013: 3).

Practices are refrains to materials and objects, which can be seen as scripts that have been passed on from generation to another. They are enfolded in the 'background' set of actions, which guide the habits and dispositions of people through the realm of "pre-personal", beyond rational, cognitively induced behavior. (Anderson & Harrison 2010: 4-7) This realm presents the changing nature of the NRT world: "the world in the present tense is always other than its representation, of what we know of it; it is always in excess and outside of representation and all horizons of calculability" (Dewsbury in Anderson & Harrison 2010: 150).

Performativity and an emphasis on the excessive are central; NRT's goal is not to re-present symbolisms or meanings but present performative manifestations or showings of everyday life (Doel in Anderson & Harrison 2010: 120). NRT takes representations as important producers of worlds, but as performances, as *doings*, not as absolute truths reflecting the world (Anderson & Harrison 2010: 15). This indicates, that the attention is rather on *how* the material dispositions of representations can be understood and unfold. This excessive and external nature indicates to the relationality, mutability and open-ended nature of the ceaseless assemblages of the world on how the process of life is always formed in relation to excessive materiality of the world (Dewsbury in Anderson & Harrison 2010: 150).

NRT thus views the world in a moving state of becoming and emphasizes the creative moments in life as forces of keeping life alive, in contrast to deadened geographies which view the world as complete (Cresswell 2013: 227). NRT criticizes the discursive views of the world which solely rely on language and text as the only ways of making of the world. Verbal expression should not be taken as the only representation of the world, as language is always filtered (Thrift 2000: 215–216). NRT addresses sayings as also doings and focuses on what escapes representation.

In NRT ontology, materiality produces 'the social' constantly, not the other way around. 'The social', the culturally and socially constructed world as a never-ending process is created over and over again through events. The NRT world is always spatial and temporal in the infinite process of the becoming of worlds, where meanings created in history no longer look the same if we turn our eye to the ceaseless, moving world through bending of time and space. This is where "geography wrests history from itself in order to discover becomings that do not belong to history even if they fall back into it" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994 in Thrift 1997: 130).

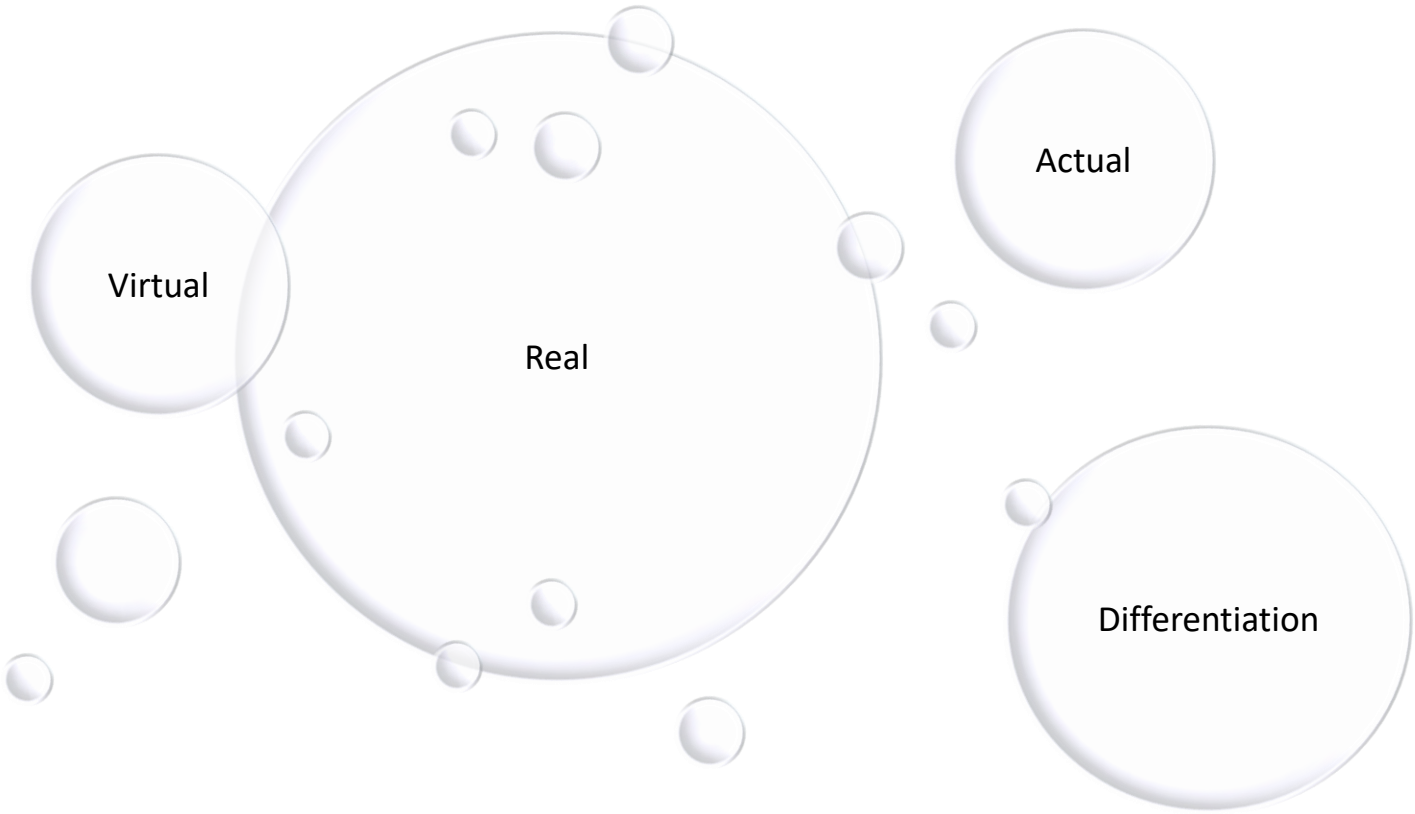


Figure 2. A mindmap of NRT's relational view of the world's multilayered forces.

### 5.1. Dance as non-representational practice

*“The body is not something I possess to dance with. I do not order my body to bend here and whirl there. I do not think `move' and then do move. No! I am the dance; its thinking is its doing and its doing is its thinking. I am the bending. I am the whirling. My dance is my body and my body is myself.''*

(Fraleigh 1987: 32)

Non-representational theorization offers a frame to focus on the affective qualities created in dance through external relations (Thrift 2000: 237-238, McCormack in Anderson & Harrison 2010: 204). Therefore, the experience created through dance in NRT is understood as a process, where permeable, affective relations can be joined in motion, rather than a focus on an internal mind experiencing the dance ‘out there’. Thrift has noted, that dance has been analyzed in social sciences in too narrow and conventional terms, where the hidden processes underlying performing dance have not been properly revealed and could not have captured the essence - which calls for a broader and creative analysis of dance (Thrift 2000: 244, 1997: 145). The affective power of dance lies in its qualities as action as itself - thinking through encounters where the focus is on the external (Thrift 2000: 237-238, 1996: 6).

To Thrift, “human life is based on and in movement” (2008: 5), which formulates dance as an essential practice to study due to its inherent capabilities in generating affect and embodied expression in non-representational ways (2000: 237). This is evident in dance as a momentary, always in the present kind of practice. Dance is in the moment, in a continuum of motion and stillness that disappears without a trace, that is, the affective and expressive qualities of dance in the domain of external spacetimes do not cross the border of re-presentation. The essence of dance is in the subtle, fragile way of being which invites the unknown, play and wonder (Thrift 1997:143-144). The unknown refers to a possibility of experiencing potentialities of the event through dance as a path to the novelty of ‘the other side’ – which creates variation or change in thinking or feeling. By understanding dance as play implies a resemblance to a creative, non-fixed practice where one can elude power structures and create an “as if” kind of imaginary world through the senses (Radley 1995 in Thrift 1997: 147).

Expressiveness and experience are at the core of body-practices like dance. Dance is formed in an on-going, open-ended process through embodiment. To Thrift (1997: 127-128), dance

is an expressive embodiment manifested through the sensory realm of the body engaging with the world. NRT's view on the expressive embodiment of dance relies on the importance of non-cognitive knowledges and animation of the body in shaping our experiences. This way, dance opens a space to study black feminisms through its particular affective qualities as a relational-materialist practice of being. To McCormack (2013), the movement of bodies cause disruptions in the field of affect and through this, engage in creating affective spaces. The qualities of these spaces can be recognized through the senses as an affective resonance or atmosphere (McCormack 2013: 3). Dance also offers an opening to review these qualities induced by thinking through the body, which can be understood as a primal state of thinking in movement (Sheets-Johnstone 1999: 421-425).

In NRT understanding, dance is not describing events of non-embodied practices nor is it representational but can be described as conjuring "a *semblance* of a world within which specific questions can take their meaning" (Radley 1995 in Thrift 1997: 147). This potential is grasped through a dispersed and expanded realm of non-linear time and space produced in bodymovement and performance (Thrift 1997: 149). This refers to a non-signifying quality of dance, which potential meaning can only be grasped and formulated through affectual experience with spacetimes. This way, dance brings forth a presentational communication, which cannot fully be expressed in text but is a manner of entering a world (Radley 1995 in Thrift 1997: 147). As an embodied practice, it entails kinesthetic sensations which guide the body through non-cognitive thinking in movement towards becoming, that is, the liminal, external relations where different spaces expand and meet. Through this process, dance is a non-representational practice and a force of being as participating and producing of worlds in encounters with other matter in the liminal spacetimes.

It is hard to record or describe dance without losing its unique, fleeting characteristics. However, approaches have been formulated to grasp the experimental and experiential nature of dance, through diagrams and refrains offered by McCormack (2013) which will be introduced in the next chapter.

### 5.2. Dance as liminal spacetimes

*"Liminality can perhaps be described as a fructile chaos. A fertile nothingness, a storehouse of possibilities, not by any means a random assemblage but a striving after new forms and structure, a gestation process, a fetation of modes appropriate to anticipating post-liminal existence."*

(Victor Turner 1991: 12-13)

In this chapter, I will describe ways that have sought to trace and describe liminal spacetimes in movement in more detail to make them more apprehensible, and most importantly, to explore the "transformative potential of bodies moving" (McCormack 2013: 51). As described in the previous chapter, dance in NRT understanding is not simply movement, but the manifestation of space and time of being beyond language and power structures. Victor Turner (1991: 93-112) has discussed the notion of liminality, where time and space have lost their linear meaning temporarily, due to suspension of the normative social system through dance. Turner (1967: 97) notes that "liminality may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise." This faith in liminality, the space in-between, is important in understanding dance as a practice from a geographical perspective that can induce potential.

In order to consider NRT's ontology of dance to have transformative potential, we need conceptual approaches, which were described in the introduction chapter. McCormack's work has concentrated on how to be affected by liminal spacetimes in movement, as they are not reachable through representational means. This requires tracing the processual components of dance, which formulate the experiential accessibility of the non-representational, virtual world.

Deleuze and Guattari (1988 in McCormack 2013: 80-82) offer the framework of refrain to rhythmic movement as the terrain, or plateau, to formulate *consistency* through differential repetition to the different forms of "kinesthetic, conceptual and textual" rhythmic thinking. In dance, the refrain emerges through the affective connections between rhythm and milieus as a thickness or quality of expression which hold the differential components together (McCormack 2013: 82). Rhythm marks the variations in progress between territories of

spacetimes, which provides the force of differentiation in repetition and in turn, potential openings of change. This is possible in understanding rhythm as creative of affective spatial relations with and between bodies through movement (McCormack 2013: 40-42). Rhythm thus invites a consistent, relational pattern of affect which is maintained by its differing in continuous movement, which in turn enables the body to experience the generative, differentiating affects in repetition. This creates a consistency, a rhythmical continuum of excess, which can 'capture the forces of the infinite´ in motion, "*like a passage from the finite to infinite"* (Deleuze and Guattari 1994 in McCormack 2013: 81). Through this process, dance can induce a refrain, which marks the potential of expressive and affective quality of dance. This induction through the in-between, liminal space, is produced through participating in and getting affected by ceaseless spacetimes. This refrain is the "differential patterning" which embodies the transformative and spatial affect of plurality that can be filtered through affective spacetimes, which locates the re-creation of geographical patterns of life (McCormack 2013: 80). This description of the process of the rhythm, affect and refrain working together through relational means indicates, that dancing as practice happens *in between* the steps. In other words, dance is never *a* dance as a noun, but always formed in between spaces in motion as a verb.

McCormack (2013: 84) describes the refrain as a conceptual tool to illustrate the patterning of spacetime, which is an expressive territory beyond the human, and includes non-human and animal becomings. He reviews the similarities of animal refrains and spaces in human experience: "refrain catalyzes expressive territories moving in a zone of indiscernible sensation between human and animal: the refrain marks a process of becoming animal through a process of becoming artist" (McCormack 2013: 84). This implies deeper spatial and ontological connections of the contingency of refrains within human and non-human forms of life. This aspect of dance as accessing beyond human, immaterial qualities of life was a predominant theme in the interviews, as one woman put it as follows: *"In movement I leave my body and become something else"* (Interviewee six). This deeper indication of entwined spaces and affects between human and non-human, and even transcendent, also serves as a crossroads between the body and surrounding space. It locates the black female body in the liminal, where patterns of transgressions and disruptions to the sexually and racially marked

body spaces are possible. This is possible through the bending of spacetimes in dance, where the sexual-racialized body no longer exist and become something else.

McCormack (2013: 87) proposes refrains to be mapped as lines, to serve "as different regimes of signs" in virtual space through diagrams. These lines express the open-ended process of dance, by taking fragments and components of movement which are already gone as composed movement but would still be able to merge with other components (McCormack 2013: 87-88). These lines give an abstract, fleeting expression a formative, grabbable shape and at the same time becomes spatialized and visible. The lines form a life-line of dance or movement patterns, which map relations and vibrations between non-representational forces of the background. The diagrams are not fixed maps, but provide a spatiotemporal formation and plasticity to refrains (McCormack 2013: 87). McCormack's work has sought to create a mapping of the refrain that does not evade representation, but rather reveals its deficiencies by making them visible, thus connecting embodied expression of the lived body with 'the social'. This is evident in how the lines seem to flesh out movement through using basic tools in the visual arts: a dot, which continues to be a line. A line thus creates movement, divides and connects the space sensed in dance.

This way, the refrain dissects an assemblage of rhythmic movement and unfolds it to a spatial geographic expression (McCormack 2013: 87-88). The refrain produced through dance connects embodied spaces of expression and offers a conceptual approach to access non-representational geographies – which opens a space to engage with and re-territorialize invisible and displaced black feminist geographies. This implies, that through this process, dance provides an (im)material realm through which a moldable, transformable geography can emerge through the bending, expanding and moving spacetimes which resonate as potential affects, knowledges, concepts and feelings for black feminist spaces.

Dance in geographical terms is thus produced through relational interplay between rhythm, refrain and affect, which places the body to the non-linear sensory realm, where the process becomes the goal itself with no beginning or ending. However, specific spatial and reiterative conditions with boundaries are necessary to think through a tangible potential created through dance. This requires *imagined* geographies *via* abstraction (McCormack 2013: 185-186), which makes creativity and improvisation possible in dance. This is the birthplace of liminal spacetimes of dance - affective experience moving between the abstract space and

the sensory realm (McCormack 2013: 88). This means, that the potential of refrains can be induced through a certain structure or choreography that creates the frames and lines within which imagination, improvisation and in turn, new geographies can be created.

This implies, that refrains can thus be understood as lived mappings or compositions, which are yet to disclose what is coming, while the future unfolds in the making. This is how dance can demonstrate a participation in these semi-structured compositions in action. This could also be illustrated in improvisational jazz for example, which is made while being weaved in the making. This processual nature of the refrain indicates fundamental embodied relations between human and material through the body, which places thinking as being produced while unfolding in action as part of these pre-dispositional relations as well. This way, refrains in dance can be viewed as thinking-spaces manifested through the body in movement. Or, as McCormack (2013: 204) writes: “generative spacetimes sensed as gatherings of intensity in the shapes of worldly arrangements”.

Next, as the last chapter of formulating dance as a generative practice of spacetimes, I will exemplify how dance registers as thinking while participating in the affective spacetimes. I will formulate this largely through a description of Sheets-Johnstone (1999: 419-425) work.


Figure 3. My evolved assemblage of connected forces in dance through a formulation of rhythm and refrain at the core of moving spacetimes of potential. Affectual spacetimes are participated through encounters in movement through which the refrain is permeated and emerged.

### 5.3. Dance as thinking-spaces

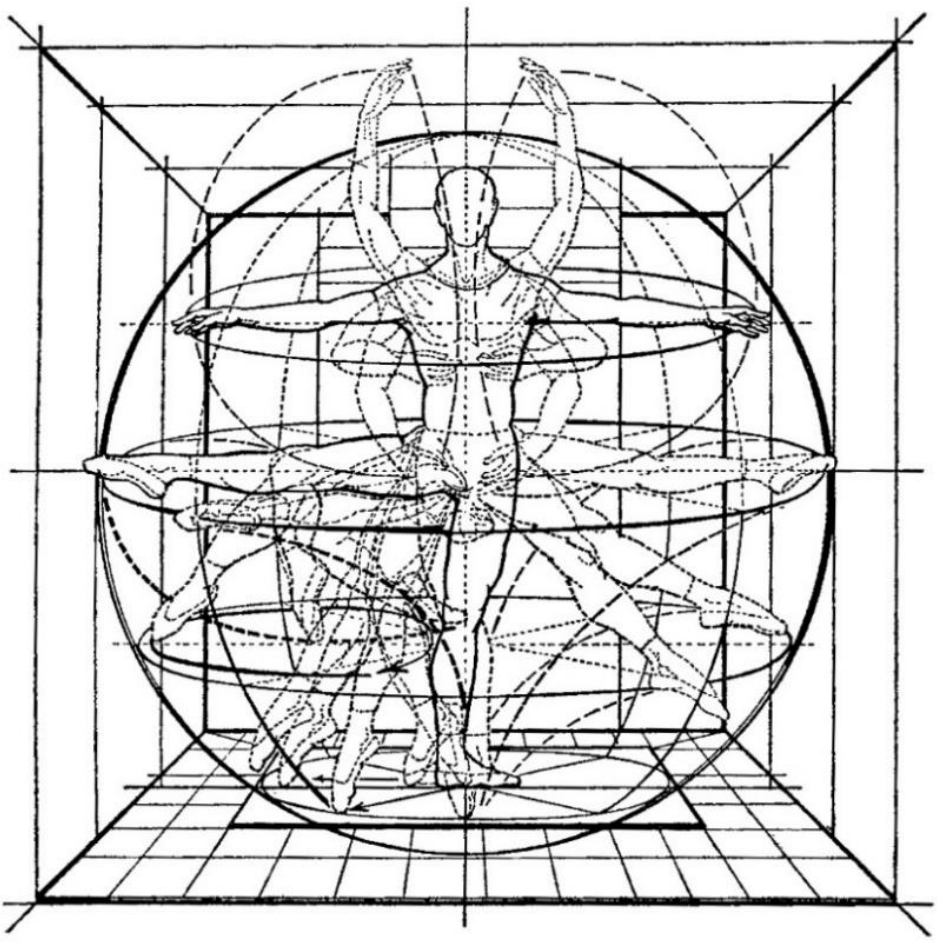

Figure 4. Kinesphere. The material space of the body (Kirstein 1984: 293).

*"Animate bodies are semantic templates, or in other words, why corporeal representation is a fundamental biological matrix. It is a primary mode of communication and symbolization. Where meanings are represented, animate bodies represent them corporeally. In their form and behavior animate bodies are a primary source of meaning."*

Sheets-Johnstone (1999: 17)

In this chapter, I will describe thought in dance as experience from the subject's point of view. This demonstrates the ontological realm of dance as praxis and serves as a pathway to the final chapter of analysis of dances as expressive black feminist geographies.

It is necessary to indicate how bodies across and through affective spacetimes, participated and generated in movement, register with thinking in dance. Improvisational dance can be

described as an unstructured, impromptu practice, where thinking evades the cognitive realm. Improvisational dance differs from choreographic dance in the sense that there is no blueprint to follow, no specific pattern to remember preceding the dance. However, as indicated in the previous chapter, the potential of creative, improvisational dance still comes from a situated place, which implies certain affective guidelines, a form within which to improvise. These can be viewed as learned spatial patterns or imprints, which can guide the dancer to seek new ones. This enables dance to mark the creative process of the dance itself, not a specific dance to be created (Sheets-Johnstone 1999: 421). This is formative to the creation of geographies in dance, through following mutable spatial imprints and patterns enables the creation of new spaces. This process can be viewed as thinking-spaces in dance, which is exemplified through NRT's view of "thought-in-action", which denies the separation of thought and action and focuses on the pre-cognitive realm of practices and action preceding thought (Anderson & Harrison 2010: 6). This implies, that in dance, the body is the arena where the weaving of thoughts happens through movement of affectual and rhythmic relations. These thinking-spaces trace how the creation of black feminist geographies in dance can be understood as mindful practices - with potential of alteration of black feminist spaces.

To McCormack (2013: 89), refrains through dance expand and disrupt geographies of expression to smaller parts of potential, which trickle with thinking, feeling and moving. To Sheets-Johnstone (1999: 426), thinking in movement is thinking in its animated form. This indicates, that if embodiment "incarnates" the body, movement is that body thinking in movement - directly with the world. Movement thus conjures the embodied subjects' animated form of thinking at its primal form. Improvisational dance creates a space for exploring and playing with the world engaging with it in an on-going, open-ended and fluid present. Sheets-Johnstone (1999: 421) reminds us that: "What is distinctive about thinking in movement is not that the flow of thought is kinetic, but that the thought itself is. It is motional through and through; at once spatial, temporal, dynamic."

This way, dance offers a way of wondering the world in movement instead of words (Sheets-Johstone 1999: 422). Through sensory perception the body addresses other bodies and responds by doing something or following accents or compositions of other bodies. The sensings are enfolded in the movement which makes the bodily and external world jointed (Sheets-Johnstone (1999: 423). This means, that movement and perception are intertwined,

the doing of the mind and doing of the body become inseparable. Thus, movement is not a product of a mind process which existed prior to the corporeal process yet still includes thinking. This proves the necessity to not to separate the mind and the body, which enables the dancing body: a thinking body which has the capability to create an impromptu dance (Sheets-Johnstone (1999: 421).

In thinking-spaces, the body can be viewed as "kinetic bodily logos" as it entangles and grasps with the sensual dynamics of the external world, which means that in improvisational movement the body is creating and unfolding with the very spatial dynamics it is unveiling (Sheets-Johnstone 1999: 424). The mutual action thus marks the spatial myriad where the body countours and is being countoured within the proactive assemblages in which it is intertwined. To Sheets-Johnstone (1999: 424), improvisational dance is a web of evolving and dissolving relations, sensings and patternings while not being referential *about* something. This means, that thinking-spaces provide a shift to a virtual, materialist potential where its value does not correlate with meaning. Actions are formulated in the moment directly after another in continuity as the situation unfolds itself. The body does not make conscious decisions on where to move next, it is rather a spatial conversation with the material web that is moving the body and vice-versa.

Improvisational dance is composed of passing moments. Like a slinky, or a coil – form a never-ending process created by immediate movements, which dissolve and expand to the moving present and continuity of movement, which are inseparably followed by one another. The "world is created neither as part of everyday nor fictitious world", but rather as multifaceted space created in the present (Sheets-Johstone 1999: 235). This is due to the incessant process of movement, even if the slinky suddenly stayed still, it would be impossible to say when the movement began or started, or whether the stillness was not part of the dance (Sheets-Johnstone 1999: 425). This notion of jointed, moving space was visible in the interview material as one woman described her experience: *"When I dance the space and I become one"* (Interviewee five). Gestures of movement are openings which have spatiotemporal layers or dynamic width about them (Sheets-Johnstone 1999: 425). The body in improvisational dance thus expands externally to a space of a sensual process of motion while a spatiotemporal world emerges. To Sheets-Johnstone (1999: 425), dance offers a way of being with the world through a direct, dynamic contingency as an "existentially resonant

body" where meaning is not tied to language nor is symbolic, it just exists for itself while creating a form of thinking via experience.

Thinking-spaces present a process of the imbrication of relational spaces moving, which shows the body's participation in creating and moving those spaces. Through this process, thinking is spatialized and activated through movement. Thinking-spaces not only indicate the significance of the practice of dance in its opening of the body's fundamental capabilities in thinking and exploring the world, but also the very aliveness and capabilities of the world and life itself in movement. This also shows the interlinkages of bodies and matter through time and space, which creates an opening to the potential in participating in embodied practices and interaction with and through external spaces.

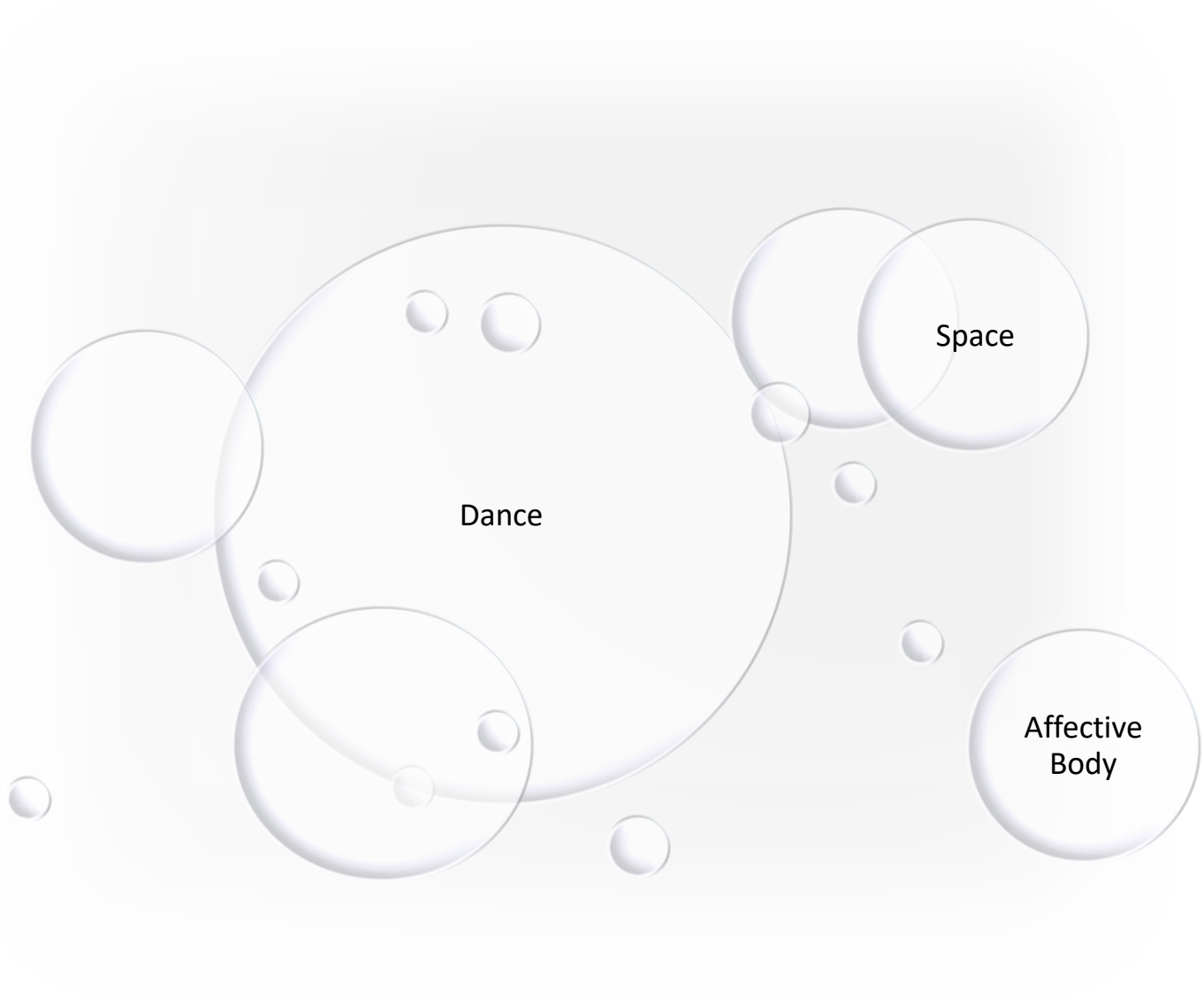


Figure 5. A figuration of the dancing body negotiating space through the affective realm. The empty shapes present unknown and wonder – the formulation of new spaces of potential. The empty space behind ‘space’ presents a hidden, silenced place, which can become visible through dance.

## 6. Tracing black feminist geographies through dance

I will pick up where I left off in chapter three and give an analysis of the empirical material through the non-representational theoretical frame discussed in this thesis. I connect the material within the frame of black feminist geography and then explore their re-location through dance as participating in expressive, liminal spaces of becoming.

I exemplify how black feminisms can (re)take place through dance. Dance is an expressive, transformative practice that can embody black feminist experiences through affectual spacetimes and offers a window to an alternative world of embodied experience of not only creativity and play, but of struggle and agency. One of my suggestions is that hidden, marginalized geographies of being can take many forms and is a complex process comprised of differential material and virtual landscapes, but never derives from a detached point of view, but is always in direct engagement with the world.

I place the setting at each dance and provide women's words on their experiences at the dances through a reflection of non-representational geography.

### 6.1. Samba de Coco as a black feminist space of becoming

*Dancers and musicians gather in a seemingly empty and simple space of an abandoned house in Olinda, chatting while waiting for the music to start. The air is already filled with expectation and smiles. Drinks exchange hands and kisses are given on strangers' cheeks while people gaze one another across the crowded room. The band is getting ready and laugh loudly while patting each other on the back. The singer steps on stage and taps the microphone and says: 'Are you ready to dance my beloved?' The crowd cheers and are already swinging their bodies, getting ready to feel a familiar rhythm. The singer clears her throat once and the music starts. Repetitive rhythmical music and singing fills the room and bodies start to swing and stomp their feet on old the wooden floor. Moving bodies join the space by moving in circles, horizontally, vertically, in smooth or sharp motions, stopping, releasing, starting again. Falling on top of other bodies or brushing someone's shoulder lightly. The feeling in the room has suddenly changed completely. The whole building feels and sounds alive with scents, touches*

*and sounds while the space seems to whir like a washing machine by itself. People's faces look eerie with glazed eyes, as if they are in another space.*

My description of coco illustrates the creative process of a room turning into an affective, expressive space created by moving bodies. This is visible in the change of atmosphere and resonance, but also already in the beginning, where there is a clear feeling of a field of vibration of a collective sensory, affective realm.

There were two main groups of themes that stood out from the interviews performed with women on the coco dances. Statements included recurring themes of immateriality, sense of being with the world, mind-body connection and healing aspects. Other themes that emerged in the interviews were cultural roots, community, black diaspora and black feminism. All the women said that they felt somehow alive, free and connected to the world when they dance. These implied therapeutic aspects, a connection with oneself and the world or existential experiences. The other main theme was related to experiences of community, family and cultural roots within the black feminist and colonial frame.

Themes can be read from a geographical point of view as follows: alive/ free = liminal space; family/community = afro-Brazilian geography; land = place; spirituality/healing = historio-cultural theme, black femininity = black feminist geography. The themes form geographies of non-representational and political claims, spiritual and symbolic values of blackness and femininity through embodiment of history, space and body.

Women's descriptions of feelings during the dance are reflections of revisiting the experience through thinking. These feelings take place after affects described have transpired in movement, which are named after the experience. This means, that women's words are continuing the practice by connecting it with other geographies and spaces. These descriptions filter a formulation of new spaces where dancing bodies enter during movement while leaving another space behind momentarily. All these descriptions suggest that through affectual experiences new geographies are made visible - deriving from a liminal space of being – and made possible through the contingency of dance.

Women's statements connect dance and geography: *"When I dance, I find myself"* (Interviewee four), *"At the coco I can forget who I am for a moment, but at the same time heal and find myself"* (Interviewee two). This indicates a tracing of the body in movement, by creating or taking a place where it belongs. The movement connects a dislocated body to external space through the space in-between. This description of searching and finding oneself indicates, that dance offers a spatial means to re-create that lost, invisible space. This shows an evident connection between dance and geography and a spatially creative force of dance's role as a black feminist practice, which can be transformative, generative of disruption for bodies tied to socially created patterns.

*"My body leads me when I dance"* (Interviewee one), *"Dance is a dialogue with myself and my surroundings"* (Interviewee one). The dancing body is placed as action in guiding the movement and given a mindful role, which connects the body to a processual, active practice with spatial agency. The body is recognized as a set of relations, of which the dancing space is a part of as another actor in the process formulation and re-formulation of those relations. The dialogue also places these relations as entwined working reciprocatively, which indicates a process of variations in motion. *"I simply have to dance and move myself to get rid of the dust"* (Interviewee two). *"At the coco there are no identities, just bodies"* (Interviewee two). The body is given a space through which to manifest its capacity, as removing or updating its patterns through which to engage with the world as it seeks to navigate in motion. This indicates a process, where the body is engaging with space and is enveloped with it at the same time, which enables thinking as doing.

*"Samba de coco is an extension of my culture and past, and an expression of our community and land"* (Interviewee six), *"I dance for the land of my family"* (Interviewee five), *"Samba de coco is about family, community and place"* (Interviewee one). Landscapes of the historio-corporeal events are given a place by being and inhabiting it through dance. This way, the place is given a symbolic meaning through dance while connecting it to potential transformation of changing those very meanings. The dancing space is also formulated as a collective affective realm produced in movement with other bodies.

*"Coco makes me feel alive and claiming myself as a black woman"* (Interviewee five) *"At the coco, I can call for my ancestors and feel alive"* (Interviewee three). *"The coco music and dance*

*need to be felt and followed as life"* (Interviewee four)*, "To me, myself and nature are one if I surrender myself to it in dance"* (Interviewee five). The lived body through movement and embodiment connects the affectual space of liminality, that the body enters in dancing through engaging directly with the world. Aliveness also indicates a potentiality in motion, as to emerge through dance if the body can surrender and to be affected by the embodied, affective spaces. This marks the journey to potential change through rhythm in continuous motion, which creates renewed bodily layers that can be unfolded to the world as new thoughts, feelings or concepts. Coco is recognized as a black feminist space through this process which enables the body to take place and which in turn can lead to novelty.

The affective spacetimes at coco dances create an opening of wonder and surprise, which enables the process of creation. This opens the potential of transformation through the relational realm as a window to the lived space hidden from fixed or static understanding of being. This way, dance provides an entrance to the process of how underlying forces of life are being made in movement within assemblages and how one can take their place within them. Dance provides the possibility to re-create a geographical trajectory when one is affected by the spacetimes, acts upon them and creates meaning from the refrain. The refrain produced through coco can work as a powerful space in locating and re-creating geographies.

Coco's place as a community, hope and a sense of belonging lies in the historical spaces of quilombos and plantations and the racial-sexualized bodies. Coco locates these places as black feminist geographies - as places of struggle, but also of hope, perseverance and pleasure. Coco makes it possible to embody the historically sexualized and racialized body and redefine it through the bodily space in the present, which eludes history, future, representation and power structures. Marginalized spaces and bodies are spatialized at cocos in the processual, unpredictable and unknown geographies of the present where communication through embodied expression between bodies and space can take place. As an expressional geography, it is a space for claiming the invisibilized bodies and locating the agency and transgression of black feminine bodies and recognizing the inherent presence of struggle through the embodied expressional body across the historio-corporeal continuum.

Coco presents a space with particular dynamics and patterns of potential through an embodied, expressive practice. The bodies mark the creation of this space by making it a lived

space of expression. They can feel the affectual resonance travelling in rhythm, while the body joins it in its movement. As the body explores the spacetimes in movement, it gradually enters a place of stillness in a sensory whirl of motion, from which an opening of a refrain is imbued, pushed out as an excess of affect. This expressive pathway, the refrain, is created through a repetitive, acceleration of rhythmic relations in between the components of the dancing space, which mark the consistency of a process which opens and unfolds in transformation.

### 6.2. Funk negotiating black feminist spaces

*An empty beach with no music. Three girls are dancing in short shorts and tank tops. Girls laugh loudly and hug each other while discussing something enthusiastically. They begin together, in lowered positions with bent knees and whining their hips and chest. Every once in a while, they take turns and improvise individually in the middle while the two other girls cheer and clap along. Girls jump into the next move with powerful force and change positions in an articulated manner. Excited laughs and screams are heard throughout the playful dancing. Girls play with their hair and do rhythmical movements with their whole bodies, sometimes slower and smoother, sometimes quicker and defined, with clear pleasure and joy spread on their faces.*

This description of funk dance of three girls in Brazil entails a powerful notion of embodied expression, pleasure and play through dance. As there is no music and no audience, the girls just dance for themselves and join and create the rhythm through the body. They express themselves in movement which has a clear direction, emotion and attitude performed by the dancer.

Funk has many elements of taking action: black feminist politics of dancing together or in formation: often women danced by taking turns and others would cheer each other on and encourage the solo woman dancing. It is sexually self-definitive, and above all it is about enjoyment together as a collective through bodily ownership. Funk is an expression of femininity, selfhood and taking place through the embodied body and performance in a loud way. Recurring themes which filtered through the interviews were healing, embodiment, mind-connection and self-ownership, agency, pleasure, sexuality and play. This combines

elements of bodily geography of the black feminine: territory, ownership and sexuality - through gendered and racialized space, and embodied geographies as taking place through expressive body politics through dance.

*"Funk gives me a voice through my body and my sisters"* (Interviewee one)*, "Funk is black sisterhood to me"* (Interviewee five), *"We cheer other girls on and encourage them to take their place"* (Interviewee one). The dancing body is placed in relational space, where it is marked through interaction with other bodies and made visible through the body. The body takes and negotiates its place through the collective affect of dancing bodies together, which ruptures the socially marked body patterns and opens a space of potential.

*"I feel I am not invisible"* (Interviewee two), "*My body is my home that I carry with me in dance"* (Interviewee five). The body is recognized as a set of relations, which are always under subject of change, yet never wavering in potential to recreate and alter those relations through movement and the affects through the dancing space. The spatialized body has agency through movement when placed in the space in between, where a constant process of becoming enables the re-configuration of the body and its socially marked patterns. The re-placement of the dancing body marks the disclosure of racialized and gendered spaces.

*When I dance, I take control of my own body"* (Interviewee three), *"I feel alive and in complete control, and everything else loses its meaning"* (Interviewee four), *"Black dance in Brazil is to be heard loud and clearly"* (Interviewee three).

The women can take their space through intention, which implies a resourceful and creative power of embodied relations taking place in funk, which in turn opens the realm for political expression induced by the affective spacetimes in dance. This indicates a transformative potential through affectual relations in dance, where the body is no longer defined by transparent space.

*"I feel sexual and playful in my black femininity and I feel empowered"* (Interviewee four). Racialized and gendered spaces are disrupted through in funk dance by making them visible, and in turn making the sexualized, socially confined spaces alterable to black feminist spaces.

*"I love my body, (especially booty) and I will swing my hips as much as I can"* (Interviewee five). Funk can be described literally as showing the *bunda (*booty) to the visible, white space and redefining the dislocated black feminine space. Funk is a positive, yet unyielding way of creating a sexual, pleasurable and embodied expression which derives through the affective realm where it is created and recreated through the variations in continuous movement. This provides with the possible opening of transformation, which in turn de-spatializes racial-sexual patterns.

Women can negotiate their bodily spaces through creative responses in dance and geographies of pleasure, pain and self-definition. An embodied and performative process of funk constitutes of spatializations of bodies, spectators' spaces and dislocated landscapes. *"When I dance, I allows me to be shameless."* (Interviewee three). This indicates a disruption of a socially marked body, which through movement formulates and receives a new pattern to follow, disrupting the old one. This process locates a historio-sexual, disembodied *shame* by performing it through the embodied expression, which disrupts its meaning in the process.

The representational, sexualized lineage of the black woman dancing is changed through locating the sexualised and historically defined body parts as a self-defining geography of political, embodied expression. In funk, this transgression of the socially constructed meaning is performed through a celebration of the body. The dislocated place defined through the spectators' eyes is re-placed by the dancing body by giving it a new meaning through change created through the affective spacetimes. Funk re-locates the racial-sexualized body, reclaiming its place in her own terms. This placement marks the dance as an embodied black feminist practice which by participating and engaging with embodied means, grasps what is means to be highly political affectively.

As funk already has a more political and performative premise (Moreira 2017), its frame allows the dancer to explore the affective atmospheres and negotiate space towards becoming by using performative, political means which derive from the pre-cognitive state. This indicates, that the dancer can imbue the embodied affects into action informed by thought through dance and enhance the affective field in the dancing space. This means, that the dancer being political, self-definitive and sexual take part in non-representational forces and engage with them in dance. These underlying forces of dance locates and re-locates

political black feminisms through the opening potential of the refrain produced through these relations.

### 6.3. Summary

*"Sometimes, in an unguarded moment, a fissure opens in a once silent body and from it flows an unstoppable, uncontainable speaking as we cast our bodies without thinking into space.*"

(Dempster 1995: 36)

To summarize this chapter of the study, dance can be understood as an embodied expression of black feminisms through situated subject agency though dance. In this view, dance is a process of black feminist space during which gender and racial hierarchy do not exist and space can be re-defined through dance. It is a process of becoming through moments of disrupting and revealing representational identities, while surrendering to the embodied realm of possibilities. Through the lens of black feminist politics, dance can be seen as a socio-spatial system in which bodies can take place, giving agency and re-imagination through the transformable, liminal space of dance, expressed as embodied margin itself. Dance thus marks both the process and product of dislocating racialized and gendered space. Racism is an "ongoing unfinished history" and black feminisms are "unfinished stories" (McKittrick 2006: 32), which orientate bodies in specific directions, affecting how they take up space. Dance provides a lived, affective space which allows the body to explore orientation beyond the familiar.

To view dance as creating an opening for a black feminist geography, it is through this process of becoming, creating an embodied, expressive space for affective bodies for the afro-Brazilian diaspora and connecting black feminist spaces. This way, dance can take and give place through an interaction of spatial relations in movement by creating and entering a liminal space: a historio-corporeal geography, which locates the historical dislocation of black bodyspaces, and the expressive space of dancing bodies re-writing the story of hidden, re-

presented black feminisms through capturing the potential, which registers in thinking in action towards a transformation.

## 7. Conclusions

By the end of this thesis I have shed light on how dance contributes as a creative praxis in locating and generating black feminist geographies. Dance produces a liminal realm where the dancing body can elude and disrupt certain social constructs through an embodiment of the body. Dance participates in affective spacetimes, which create an opening for novel thinking, knowledge and becoming for black feminisms. This opening makes it possible to follow and renew trajectories of geographies.

Dance is an expressive practice of tracing those geographies through grasping the consistency of affective spacetimes. These processes mark the spaces where there is no endpoint or beginning in movement, they follow the process itself. This lived, processual space is where new practices can be negotiated and found through embodied movement. Dances such as samba de coco and funk are potential spaces of black feminist geographies where one can take the space and sense through the lines where lies the unknown and re-creation. Dance provides a practice for geographical thought and theory formation to draw from as a percolating, porous space that is constantly evolving and changing.

My two seemingly different examples of Brazilian dances can both be located in the frame of black feminisms. This includes core themes of embodied black feminist geography; politics of location and experience, self-definition and group knowledge of the margin. Funk and samba de coco can be described to complement these frameworks, when seen to apply black feminist geographies of pleasure and pain and politics of territorialiazation of the body through space and time. In this study, however, the goal was to point out that dance in general can be seen as an ontologically significant and transforming non-cognitive expression of the body. Dances differ in spheres of choreography and improvisation and are highly heterogeneous depending on the context. Even though the examples given of afro-Brazilian dances are tied to specific spatially located social patterns, dance itself as movement as space

and in space is a globally connected form of expression which can be applied to geographical thinking.

I have emphasized the significance of embodied and expressive practices to engage with black feminisms. These expressions point out, that rather than evaluating how successful the imaginative works are in their feminist geographies, we might ask what kind of work they do to reimagine feminisms. A shift from traditional geographical paradigms to the viewpoint of embodied black feminist geography, provides a way to see what kind of information could be gathered looking through the liminal space. As embodied knowledge and expression connect black feminist geographies and dance, the lens was directed to the dislocation of creative black feminist geographies of dance and recognize them as locating concealed struggles and transgressions – what is hidden, silenced and what spaces come forward. In this sense, dance can be viewed as a creative, embodied black feminist geographical response to spatial inequalities.

Dance's elusiveness only presents the elusiveness of life itself, constantly in processual flux, where its meaning is created and re-created in a process of continual motion. Dance connects spaces between human and non-human, physical and material, past and future in a spatiotemporal continuity. It provides a window to the non-cognitive practice of movement and relations of the body, human and material through the virtual. Dance has a powerful way of capturing the stillness and movement throughout spatiotemporal history by bending it to understand, and be affected by, the underlying forces created in the background.

This way, dance provides a way to enter the state of being and its potentialities. This view of the world, or worlds, make it a more hopeful, less stagnated place with infinite possibilities of change.

## 8. Reflections

I want to share a few thoughts regarding some observations on the themes discussed in this study and reflect research question number three: how can feminist and non-representational thinking inform one another?

When I was introduced to non-representational theory, it really spoke to me - not only in the context of dance and my fieldwork experience, but also resonated with a lot of feminist thought of considering other realities and spaces from novel perspectives. In this study, the role of non-representational thinking was to reflect the practice of dance as an opening for feminisms, but maybe the discussion could be brought further to understand, where feminist and NRT thinking stand together and see what comes forward.

As stated, many feminist theories have been framed by social and cultural constructivism, which entails a discursive notion of representations qua meanings inscribed onto bodies. Constructivist theorization recognized the fabrication and artificial organization of re-presentational system(s). It moved away from the biological, dualistic understandings of fixed systems of the world to a constructed, fabricated world, but it fails to recognize embodied practices or materialisms when discourses are placed beyond the body - rendering the body a mindless machine to be manipulated by power regimes. This is visible for example in the oppressor/oppressed and domination/resistance dualisms, which place relative, cartesian notions of the world as truths, which need to be resisted to change. This understanding essentializes the world as an inert, dead object to be analyzed from afar rather than a relational, lived ordering with a contingent nature. As Anderson & Harrison (2010: 6) state, "the cost of this is the division of the world to its meanings and the real world." This ordering or 'the social' is seen differently from a non-representational and materialist perspective. NRT's relational and fluid view of power structures and agency beyond humanism and individualism can be considered in creative and embodied feminisms.

NRT's views differ from a constructivist perspective, but that does not mean that it undermines or denies the existence of social constructions and inequality, they are simply looked at from a different perspective. The goal of NRT is thus not to wipe out social

inequalities and difference, but instead probe how our practices bring the representations about. To address feminist geographies through or with NRT, it is more useful to reflect its theorizations when we want to re-imagine things, subject or agency formations as not fixated or stagnated, and rather view marginalization, resistance and struggle as relational processes of transgression, which are an inherent part of making the world. This encourages creative responses and views from different perspectives and offers a way to reveal the gaps in the assumed histories, stories and systems, which have caused their stagnated re-presentations, and in turn the re-creation of new ones possible.

For further research, NRT theorization could serve as a frame for feminist subjectivities, changing the ontology of agency and difference, or provide with a tool to interpret practices like dance in producing feminist subjectivities through embodied space. This way, NRT can provide a shift of worldview to understand the underlying moving forces of subject formation, while enfolding feminist thought.

This research process led to a theory focused exploration through different frames of thinking to understand the world. The process gave me a valuable learning experience and a deeper understanding of the multilayered, spatial nature of the world which has only strengthened my quest for experiential, creative (and playful) approaches to research, writing and life.

I end this study with a poem to remind us of the open-endedness and brevity of the world.

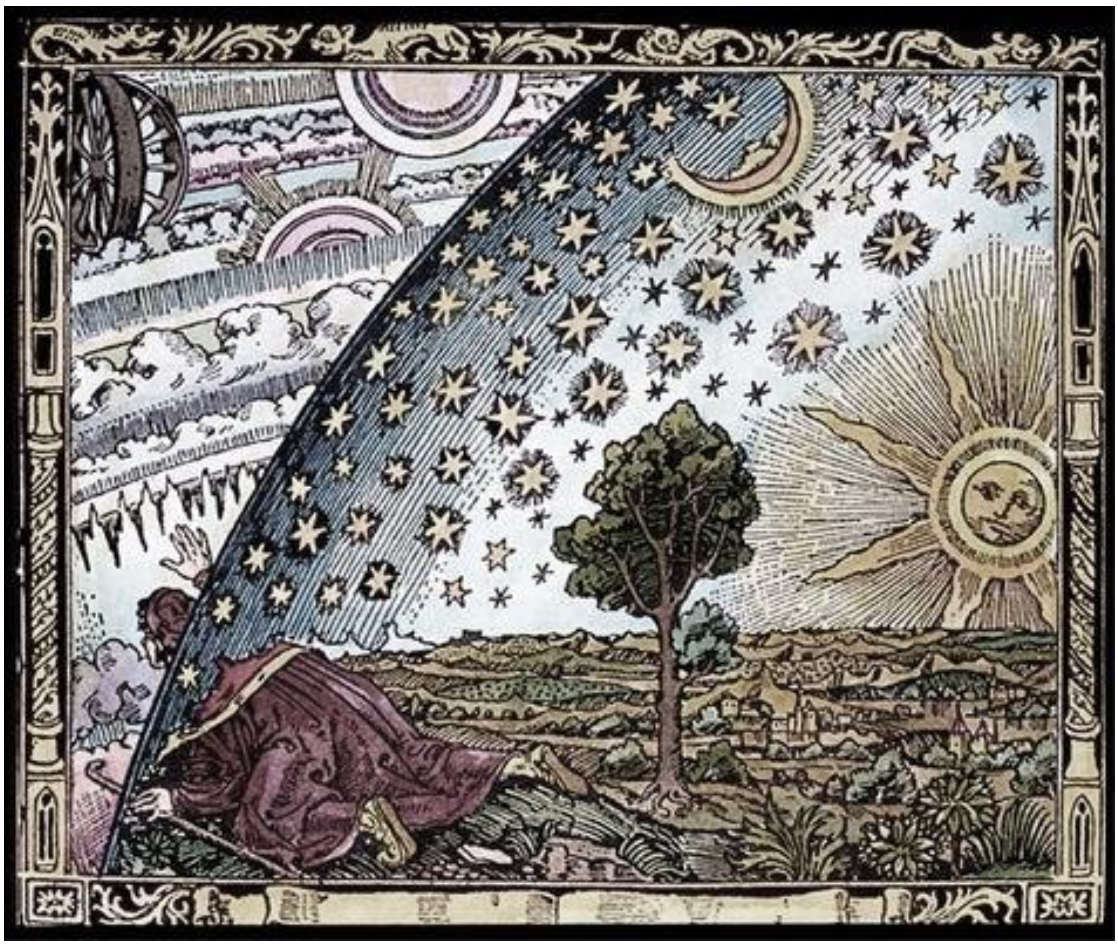

Figure 6. A man reaching for the infinite. (Camille Flammarion 1888: 163)

*Carved glazes of fresh paint*
*spin pearls and bouquets*
*in eroding coils*
*as rusty as condensed copper*

*Between humming silences*
*mapped by lungs and veins*
*a rhizome not to be traced*
*somewhere swirls in spiral*

*In the tangled wisp of bleached feathers*
*the arch of a tree bending over*
*hidden spaces of porous whispers*
*stirring between bifurcating stories*

(Eeva Mäkinen 2020)

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